

2.3 Given that existing EU members have been granted temporary exemptions in this area, it is only fair and reasonable in terms of both principle and precedent that the accession States should also be able to benefit from temporary exemptions where this can be justified.

2.4 In conclusion, the EESC recommends the approval of this directive, which will give a clear political signal to the accession States that the EU is fully committed to their development. In order to ensure that the accession States are not placed in a situation that could entail budgetary difficulties, the EESC calls on the Council to adopt this directive as soon as possible.

Brussels, 28 April 2004

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Roger BRIESCH

---

### **Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Assessing the EU sustainable development strategy - exploratory opinion'**

(2004/C 117/08)

On 12 November 2003, in a letter from Ms Loyola de Palacio, the European Commission asked the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to draw up an exploratory opinion on 'Assessing the EU sustainable development strategy.'

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on this subject, adopted its opinion on 5 April 2004. The rapporteur was Mr Ribbe, and the co-rapporteur was Mr Ehnmark.

At its 408<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 28 and 29 April 2004 (meeting of 28 April), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 77 votes to 23, with 14 abstentions:

#### **0. Summary**

0.1 Efforts have been under way for many years to promote sustainable development in the EU and curb non-sustainable trends. In a bid to consolidate and step up these efforts, a sustainable development strategy was adopted for the Union at the EU summit in Gothenburg. However, the most recent studies by European Commission indicate that efforts so far remain inadequate and that, on this front, Europe continues to face major challenges.

0.2 This exploratory opinion, drawn up by the Committee at the Commission's request, examines the range of problems facing the EU on the road towards sustainable development and considers how the EU should strengthen its sustainable development strategy. The reasons are manifold. One is that, in politics and society, views vary widely as to what actually constitutes sustainable development and the extent to which our current production and consumption patterns are already compatible with sustainability considerations or have to be changed – in other words what specifically needs to be done and by whom (cf. point 2.2 below).

0.3 The Committee feels that one key task of the revised sustainable development strategy is to make clear that, for the most part, sustainable development involves changes, which if the ways and means of achieving them are chosen correctly, can be for the better and that society as a whole benefits as a result. On that point for the better and that society as a whole benefits as a result. On that point, however, there is nowhere near a consensus, and indeed, doubts are being raised as to whether it is possible to square Europe's economic competitiveness with sustainable development.

0.4 The Committee has never doubted that a healthy economy with flourishing businesses is the key condition for employment and environment and the further development of society, or conversely that it is also, to an increasing extent, the direct result of the level and quality of the latter factors. So far, it has proved impossible to get over the message that, in that sense, sustainable development generates significant new opportunities. One reason for that is that no adequate response has yet been given to many of the issues raised in various demands and publications (cf. point 2.2). People are unclear about the consequences, and so scepticism gains ground. The Committee therefore urges the Commission to discuss in detail and clarify all the basic issues of understanding involved, as part of a broad social debate with organised civil society (cf. point 2.3). This also includes issues that have so far been taboo.

0.5 Sustainable development means further developing the market economy. It means linking environment, employment and competitiveness even more closely with issues of distributive and intergenerational justice (cf. point 2.1.10 below). The sustainable development strategy must therefore think in much longer timeframes and take account of many more aspects than the Lisbon strategy. The key aim of the latter is to make Europe the most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. In point 2.4, therefore, the Committee looks at the links between the two strategies and at how they can best complement each other. In saying that, however, the Committee also notes that some issues do remain unresolved.

0.6 Free market forces are already regulated today, among other things by environmental and social obligations, and the implementation of a consistent sustainable development policy will continue this process. For some sectors, that will give a new boost to growth while, for unsustainable activities, it will mean economic decline. Thus, sustainable development will also involve reducing unsustainable trends. This calls for debate about taxation, subsidies, licensing and regulation to ensure implementation of this sustainability model.

0.7 The Committee is clear that the current EU sustainable development strategy adopted at the Gothenburg summit needs revision. This revision must seek a better balance between the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability (cf. point 3.2 ff). The strategy must also make clear how the individual EU policies can be framed more coherently (cf. point 3.8 ff) and how the requisite national, regional and even local sustainable development strategies can be interlinked (cf. point 5).

0.8 Sustainable development not only necessitates changes in production and consumption patterns within the EU, but must of course also have an impact on international trade, including therefore the WTO. Any policy which, for example, internalises all external costs and takes account of additional factors as well for the sake of sustainable development can produce competitive disadvantages vis-à-vis other economies which ignore, in full or in part, the principle of sustainability. In such a case, it must be possible to compensate for sectoral trade disadvantages. Therefore, in point 6, the Committee asks the Commission to take account of the external aspects and thus, *inter alia*, to urge a change in WTO rules.

0.9 The future sustainable development strategy is more likely to succeed if it includes measures and objectives that are quantified as far as possible, and lays down readily understandable indicators for monitoring progress and evaluating the effectiveness of policies (cf. point 7). In the sustainable development strategy, that is difficult as there is no point at which the target can be said to have been reached. Seen in that light, therefore, sustainable development is not so much a goal as a process, and that does not make policymaking any easier.

Nonetheless, an attempt should be made to lay down the clearest possible objectives and set a timeframe. Frequently, that will involve a large number of intermediate steps. To make that clear, the Committee cites the Kyoto objectives.

0.10 Sustainable development policy obviously also needs to be reviewed. Above all, however, it needs to be transparent, since sustainable development depends on wide social consensus and broad support. This requires a broad range of knowledge, including about what sustainable development actually is, what its impact will be and what will happen if we fail to implement sustainable development policy. The new strategy should therefore be worked out and subsequently implemented in the context of a broad policy debate (cf. point 8). The participatory process must, however, be quite different from the one pursued in the run-up to Gothenburg. At that time, the deadlines were much too tight and there was no genuine social discussion of the kind conducted, to some extent, during the compilation of this EESC exploratory opinion.

## 1. Foreword

1.1 In a letter dated 12 November 2003, Ms de Palacio, vice-president of the European Commission, asked the European Economic and Social Committee to draw up an exploratory opinion on the EU sustainable development strategy as input to the main political orientations for a review of the strategy. The Commission asked the Committee to:

- assess the progress made towards achieving the headline objectives of the sustainable development strategy;
- assess the need for broadening the strategy;
- analyse the consequences of enlargement;
- discuss the possibility of constructing a stronger linkage to national strategies;
- discuss the importance of including the external aspects and follow-up to Johannesburg under the general strategy;
- discuss the need to set clearer strategic objectives and indicators;
- provide insights on how to improve implementation procedures; and
- provide ideas on how to devise a communication strategy on sustainable development.

1.2 However, this exploratory opinion also seeks to carry forward the ongoing internal debate within the Committee, as organised civil society at every political and administrative level has to play an instrumental role in – and contribute towards – making sustainable development a reality for the good of present and future generations.

## 2. Assessment of progress made towards achieving the headline objectives

### 2.1 Towards sustainable development: the current state of play

2.1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee has no doubt that, over the past few years, sustainable development has become an increasingly important topic for political discussion. The Commission has undoubtedly recognised the fundamental importance of this issue, and sustainable development is also formally enshrined in the European Treaties<sup>(1)</sup>. The Committee expects sustainable development to be consolidated as an overarching objective in the upcoming constitution.

2.1.2 The Commission can now point to a broad range of sustainable development initiatives. The attempt to establish the requisite links between economic, social and environmental issues has clearly become more important – and attracted more attention – in recent years. To take one example, the June 1998 Cardiff European Council invited all relevant formations of the Council to establish comprehensive strategies for taking account of environmental and sustainable development concerns within their respective policy areas<sup>(2)</sup>. Regrettably, this process – where very little is happening at the moment – cannot be considered successfully completed. The Lisbon strategy that has been launched in the meantime has so far proved to be an inadequate vehicle for sustainable development – hence the decision at the Gothenburg European Council to add an environmental dimension.

2.1.3 The Gothenburg European Council, drawing on a communication from the Commission, selected four out of six proposed priority issues for the sustainability debate. These are:

- climate change
- transport
- public health
- natural resources.

The eradication of poverty and population ageing were not selected. As a result, the sustainable development strategy appears to focus on the environmental dimension and pay less attention to social aspects. The Committee feels this sends out an inadequate signal. The Committee considers such structural aspects as fundamental to a long-term perspective, to taking into account the global dimension of the strategy, and, last but not least, to citizens' commitment to its improvement.

<sup>(1)</sup> See Art. 2, EC Treaty

<sup>(2)</sup> Cardiff European Council presidency conclusions, 15 and 16 June 1998, no. 34

2.1.4 The Commission has started subjecting its own policies – or at least policy elements – to scrutiny in a bid to establish whether it is on the right track towards achieving sustainable development. Probably the most recent (partial) assessment is the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament entitled the 2003 Environment Policy Review<sup>(3)</sup>. In this paper, the Commission examines the environmental dimension of sustainability and arrives at some very sobering conclusions<sup>(4)</sup>.

2.1.4.1 On the issue of climate protection, the Gothenburg summit announced the intention of making 'demonstrable progress' by 2005 already in achieving the Kyoto commitments<sup>(5)</sup>. However, as the Environment Policy Review makes clear, the EU is unlikely to be in any position to achieve the Kyoto objectives if it sticks to its current policy.

2.1.4.2 On transport too, there is no indication that the EU is on the right track towards a more sustainable policy. Transport-related climate-damaging emissions are still on the increase, for instance, and in particular trends are 'not encouraging in acceding countries: there has been a sharp fall in rail and bus transport and higher growth rates in air and private car transport than in the EU'<sup>(6)</sup>.

2.1.4.3 On the health front, the Commission notes that some 60,000 people in the EU's large cities die each year as a result of excessive air pollution. One child in seven suffers from asthma and numbers have risen dramatically in the past few years<sup>(7)</sup>.

2.1.4.4 On the question of natural resources, the outlook also remains pretty poor. Particularly in the field of biodiversity, the Commission still sees major difficulties for the EU<sup>(8)</sup>.

2.1.5 The Commission finally came to the conclusion in December 2003 that a great many measures have been taken over the past few years to protect the environment but that not enough has yet been done in 'curbing current unsustainable environmental trends'<sup>(9)</sup>. This is by no means a welcome finding, but nor is it wholly surprising, since the Commission's 1999 Communication on Europe's environment: Towards Sustainability<sup>(10)</sup> had already made the point that 'progress towards sustainability has clearly been limited' and that 'the trends highlighted in this Communication ... show that we are not on track in ensuring sustainable development'.

<sup>(3)</sup> COM(2003) 745 final, 3.12.2003, including the annex

<sup>(4)</sup> These conclusions fully concord with European Environment Agency studies. See [http://reports.eea.eu.int/environmental\\_assessment\\_report\\_2003\\_10/en](http://reports.eea.eu.int/environmental_assessment_report_2003_10/en)

<sup>(5)</sup> Gothenburg European Council presidency conclusions, 15 and 16 June 2001, no. 28

<sup>(6)</sup> COM(2003) 745 final

<sup>(7)</sup> COM(2003) 745 final

<sup>(8)</sup> COM(2003) 745 final

<sup>(9)</sup> COM(2003) 745 final

<sup>(10)</sup> COM(1999) 543 final, p. 22

2.1.6 The upshot of all of this is, in the Committee's view, that we are just at the start of a doubtless difficult road towards sustainable development. This is also clear from the fact that, in some key areas of environment policy, the Commission has only just started drawing up the papers that, ultimately, are supposed to set out specific strategies. The Committee is so far unaware of any papers at all being drawn up on progress made in the economic and social dimension of the sustainability debate.

2.1.7 The Committee's current impression, therefore, is that

- the Commission is undoubtedly right in its assessment of the difficulties Europe faces in the field of sustainable development;
- tools and measures – both theoretical and practical – have already been worked out, discussed and, in some cases, even implemented (e.g. an end to harmful subsidies, greater support for sustainable procedures and the internalisation of external costs);
- these tools and measures are not, however, being put into practice consistently enough.

2.1.8 Thus, the Committee agrees with the Commission that 'many of the current environmentally unsustainable trends stem from a lack of attention to inter-linkages between sectors, leading to policies in different areas working against one another rather than being mutually supportive. This lack of policy coherence renders policies both more costly and less effective and thus hinders progress towards sustainable development.'<sup>(1)</sup>

2.1.9 That the Commission is aware that some of its own policies are more of a hindrance than a help to sustainable development is all the more significant in that it also recognises the vital need for sound political leadership on this front: 'Strong political commitment will be needed to make the changes required for sustainable development. While sustainable development will undoubtedly benefit society overall, difficult trade-offs between conflicting interests will have to be made. We must face up to these trade-offs openly and honestly. Changes to policy must be made in a fair and balanced way, but narrow sectional interests must not be allowed to prevail over the well-being of society as a whole.'<sup>(2)</sup>

2.1.10 The Committee notes the EU's failure, in its consideration of the sustainability issue to date, to include in any discernible way key matters such as intergenerational justice (are we living at the expense of future generations?), distributive justice (are we living at the expense of other societies,

for instance the Third World?) or global poverty eradication. Or at least, it has failed to give an adequate airing to these matters. A better solution might well be for the Commission to monitor sustainable development constantly, not only in terms of the environment, but taking account of the economic and social dimension as well. The 2001 Stockholm European Council already made the point that 'the forthcoming [broad economic policy] guidelines should also integrate the promotion of sustainable development'<sup>(3)</sup>. That, however, has still to happen. In this context, the issues in question would have to be addressed just as fully as the question of what the long-term environmental impact would be if the entire world population were to adopt our current production and consumption system unchanged<sup>(4)</sup>.

2.1.11 The EU financial perspective for 2007-2013<sup>(5)</sup> could have been an opportunity to give a decisive impulse to sustainable development. However, the Committee notes that it is not enough merely to press ahead unchanged with current policies that have raised difficulties for sustainable development, and to pursue them in future under the 'sustainable growth' budget heading. The Committee points out that, first of all, 'sustainable development' and 'sustainable growth' are two different things, which should be mutually reinforcing but may indeed conflict (cf. point 2.3). Hence, a clear distinction is also needed in the financial perspective.

2.2 *Why have we not yet made more decisive progress? What are the difficulties on the path to sustainable development?*

2.2.1 The Committee feels that sustainable development is not making sufficient progress for the following reasons:

- no consensus has yet been reached on assessing the current state of play – let alone on the action to be taken – either globally or at EU, national, regional or local level;
- there is a great deal of uncertainty as to what sustainable development actually means and how future development will differ from the situation in which we live today – which, in turn, generates fears and resistance in the sectors potentially affected;
- it still remains unclear how the sustainable development agenda fits into day-to-day policy, what form it is to take and how, in practice, the sustainability angle is to be incorporated into all the relevant policy areas;
- and how to resolve the potential conflict between a rigorous sustainable development policy and, for example, world trade rules (WTO)<sup>(6)</sup>.

<sup>(3)</sup> Stockholm European Council presidency conclusions, 23 and 24 March 2001, no. 48

<sup>(4)</sup> The Committee notes that, at the moment, 20% of the people consume some 80% of all resources. Thus, because of the exorbitant energy consumption, 5% of the living population (USA) generate 25% of all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

<sup>(5)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Building our common future – Policy challenges and budgetary means of the Enlarged Union, 2007-2013, COM(2004) 101 final

<sup>(6)</sup> see also point 6

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2003) 745 final, p. 22

<sup>(2)</sup> COM(2001) 264 final

2.2.2 The Committee considers the sustainable development strategy as the overarching political objective for the coming decades. All current policies and programmes must be channelled towards it, and must be consistent with – and conducive to – long-term sustainability objectives. That applies to the Lisbon strategy (see point 2.4) and to all other policy strategies and schemes currently in the pipeline.

2.2.3 Politically, the Commission can build on broad popular support. Surveys have shown that a very large majority of the population support the principle of intergenerational justice and the objective of using no more resources than it is possible to regenerate, although only a minority have actually ever heard the term ‘sustainable development’. In other words, people can identify with the overall policy objectives of sustainable development, but only a small minority are au fait with the term sustainable development itself. That indicates a major problem of communication that must be resolved.

2.2.4 It is easy to agree on relatively woolly definitions of sustainable development such as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’<sup>(1)</sup>. Such statements brook no denial.

2.2.5 Phrases like ‘Let’s not repeat our mistakes’ — often heard in connection with EU enlargement — also trip easily off the tongue. They remain just words, however, if nothing is said about what precisely those mistakes are or if countermeasures are put forward but not acted upon. Transport policy is a good case in point.

2.2.6 One objective of the sustainable development strategy must therefore be to identify the negative trends more clearly than in the past and to work out how to counter them. Work should also be stepped up to promote positive examples and development trends.

2.2.7 A strategy is defined as a detailed plan for achieving a specific goal, factoring in, from the outset, those elements that might potentially impact any action taken. Thus, the future EU sustainable development strategy should:

- provide clear objectives;
- outline the individual tools to be used to reach the objective(s); which also involves setting out precisely the responsibilities, remits and scope for exerting influence in each case;
- divide, if necessary, long-term objectives into intermediate goals that can be regularly monitored using readily comprehensible indicators;
- address those factors that may cause problems in this process; and

<sup>(1)</sup> Our Common Future – the Brundtland report, World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987

- see to it that all policy areas are consistently analysed and assessed using sustainability criteria.

2.2.8 Sustainable development is more a qualitative process and only some of its objectives can be readily quantified using specific figures. Many other policy areas have definable objectives (x % growth, y % unemployment or a limit value of z), but, with sustainable development, we shall never reach the stage at which we can say that, as soon as a particular measure is in place or a certain law adopted, then our goal will be achieved. As political objectives remain somewhat vague for many people however, it is all the more important to set out, using specific examples drawn from real life, what sustainable development actually means and what impact a strategy will have.

2.2.9 In an own-initiative opinion of 31 May 2001<sup>(2)</sup>, the Committee welcomed the then draft EU sustainable development strategy. The Committee said it was ‘aware that policies for sustainable development contain in part and by their very nature a radical approach to the development of society in the future. Some painful decisions will have to be taken along the road.’ On this point, however, the EU sustainable development strategy is extremely woolly and far too abstract. It fails to make truly clear the specific changes that lie ahead – and at which level – and the necessary impact of this long-term policy on today’s economic and commercial life.

2.2.10 In the foreword to the EU brochure on sustainable development, the Commission president, Romano Prodi does indeed say that sustainable development ‘is not an academic concept with no practical importance — it is about real issues and real choices that profoundly affect our daily lives.’<sup>(3)</sup> However, the highly abstract strategy is not specific enough about what these profound effects actually are. That is one of the critical shortcomings that must be remedied in future.

2.2.11 The Committee stands by its commitment to sustainable development. It agrees that sustainable development is neither a luxury for ‘rich’ societies, nor just one of several possible options. It is necessary to move away from patterns of production and consumption that have proven to be non-sustainable. The aim, after all, is to safeguard the very foundations of human life – which are also the foundations of economic activity. Sustainable development is thus a sine qua non for meeting future challenges.

2.2.12 It should be continually underlined that sustainable development implies fundamental changes in how society functions. Citizens must be empowered, on the basis of knowledge and training, to make sustainable development a reality and meet the challenges that it poses for the future.

<sup>(2)</sup> Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the preparation of a European Union strategy for sustainable development, OJ C 221, 7.8.2001, p. 169-177

<sup>(3)</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/sustainable/docs/strategy\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/sustainable/docs/strategy_en.pdf)

2.2.13 The Committee stands by this statement, in the knowledge that substantial changes will certainly come about. It doubts that there will be nothing but win-win situations in this context. If genuine progress is to be made, however, then it is vital to provide a clear link between the abstract issues and objectives and the practicalities of the real world. It is essential to provide people with a clear picture close up of seemingly remote issues. This means that the strategy has to provide answers to a wide range of unresolved issues, including:

- What might be the specifics of the factor 10 concept mentioned in the Commission Communication Towards Sustainability<sup>(1)</sup> which seeks in the longer term to cut industrial countries' use of resources to one tenth of current levels in absolute terms and to distribute resources more fairly across the world? Is this concept to be made mandatory as part of the sustainable development strategy? How can a (growing) economy operate, how can transport function if only a tenth of the raw materials is available? Where are the realistic limits to resource efficiency? What tools could or should be used to implement this approach?
- What form can a competitive economy (that also creates high-quality jobs) take if climate-damaging emissions have to be cut by some 70 % worldwide? <sup>(2)</sup> How would competitiveness change once the factor 10 concept is also applied to the energy sector, i.e. if the share of renewables has to grow much more strongly than so far planned?
- What economic sectors will face difficulties if they have to meet the considerable external costs of non-sustainable production methods? Which will see renewed growth? How will that structural change pan out in practice and how should it be framed and supported at a political level?
- What specific policy measures will be needed, for instance, to decouple transport growth from economic growth? What will such measures mean for the division of labour in the economy?
- What, specifically, will be done to tackle the abolition of subsidies that undermine sustainable development? What particular subsidies are involved?

<sup>(1)</sup> Cf. COM(1999) 543, 24.11.1999, p. 15, point 4.4: Efficient use and management of resources and the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission - Europe's Environment: What directions for the future? The Global Assessment of the European Community Programme of Policy and Action in relation to the environment and sustainable development, 'Towards Sustainability', OJ C 204, 18 July 2000, p. 59-67

<sup>(2)</sup> For Europe, that could mean an even greater reduction, given the rises expected across the world.

- How are external costs to be internalised (and by when)? What impact will that have on, for instance, transport, where the Commission itself notes that 'less than half of the external environmental costs ... are internalised in the market prices' thereby encouraging 'unsustainable ... demand'? <sup>(3)</sup> What would it mean for the energy sector if the average external costs of electricity production were to be factored into final consumers' bills (approximately 4-5 cent per kilowatt-hour for coal- and 3-6 cent for oil-fired electricity production)? <sup>(4)</sup>

2.2.14 The strategy's failure to provide readily understandable answers to such questions may very well generate fears in certain circles – and ultimately lead to resistance to the policy in question. This risk is particularly great if the impression is created that sustainable development is more of a complication and a threat to the economy and is thus not seen as an opportunity for the future. The Committee's fear is that we in Europe have now reached that stage. That explains why sustainable development has run into difficulties and why reports on the issue have not so far been more positive.

2.2.15 Although worthy of support, the following key statement by the Gothenburg European Council does nothing, for the time being, to remedy this state of affairs. The Council states that: 'clear and stable objectives for sustainable development will present significant economic opportunities. This has the potential to unleash a new wave of technological innovation and investment, generating growth and employment.'<sup>(5)</sup> This important message, which the Committee endorses, has not to date been credibly conveyed to – or rather has not been taken on board by – large swathes of society and industry. Sustainable development is not yet recognised as a genuine engine for industry and growth.

2.2.16 For the Committee it is clear that implementing sustainable development will require huge investments in areas such as building renovation, environmentally-sound transport systems, sustainable energy production and promotion of environmental technologies. These investments, which will create many jobs and give a new fillip to growth, are essential to making sustainable development a reality.

2.2.17 Due consideration must be given to the issues of allocating financial resources, if a sustainable development strategy is to become a reality. The framework for a climate conducive to such investments must be created by policymakers on the basis of consultation with – and the participation of – organised civil society. Public budgets must lay down appropriate investment priorities. Heavy investment will also be needed in the private sector as well, however, in order to boost the economy and the labour market.

<sup>(3)</sup> SEC(1999) 1942, 24.11.99 p. 14

<sup>(4)</sup> Figures from External Costs – Research results on socio-environmental damages due to electricity and transport; EU Commission – Community Research, 2003

<sup>(5)</sup> Gothenburg European Council presidency conclusions, 15 and 16 June 2001, no. 21

2.2.18 If, however, we do not succeed in making clear that sustainable development generates significant new opportunities for the economy, then there can be no constructive political debate on sustainable development and on ways of achieving it.

2.2.19 In addition to the fact that both the objectives and the political tools are too vague and abstract, there is another shortcoming in the sustainable development strategy to date, namely that even interested observers are unable to keep track of where all the provisions are to be found. The Committee notes the vast amount of paperwork dealing with this issue to a greater or lesser extent – and in greater or lesser depth<sup>(1)</sup>. To the interested reader, it is not clear which statements and provisions are mandatory. Even the EU webpages fail to provide any additional help in that regard.

2.2.20 The Committee recognises that it is very difficult for the Commission to persuade people to support those facets of the sustainable development debate in areas which they feel do not directly concern them. That is true even for relatively 'live' issues (e.g. nature conservation, where some people wonder why less biodiversity is a problem or why, say, the disappearance of the stork is such a bad thing. It is even more difficult to convey to people that large carnivores such as lynx and wolves are also part of Europe's cultural and natural heritage and deserve protection.) Two much more thorny issues have already been touched on: distributive justice and intergenerational justice. People generally speaking do recognise that future generations should have the opportunity to have a good life, but there is a broad and noticeable trend in society to put many of life's economic imponderables on the back burner. This is hardly conducive to the sustainability debate.

### 2.3 *The need to clear up some basic issues of understanding*

2.3.1 For the Committee, sustainable development represents a further, pro-active development of the market economy, expanded to take account of environmental issues and other considerations such as intergenerational and distributive justice.

2.3.2 In widening the approach in this way – by no means an easy task – the Committee considers one thing to be vital: the new sustainability strategy must make clear that, when it is being implemented, the economic, social and environmental conditions must be such that sustainable development has the least possible adverse effect on European economic competitiveness, but rather acts as a new stimulus for growth.

<sup>(1)</sup> The brochure on the European Union's sustainable development strategy alone quotes the conclusions of the Gothenburg European Council, the Commission Communication on the EU sustainable development strategy, the consultation paper for drawing up a sustainable development strategy and the minutes of a hearing co-hosted by the Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee on the issue. We also have the sixth environment action programme and the Lisbon strategy, and will shortly have other strategies on, inter alia, the sustainable use of natural resources (N.B.: ... mention the others)

2.3.3 The Committee is aware that industry is instrumental in developing and implementing better technologies to decrease unsustainable trends and resource use. In order to play its role, industry needs to be competitive, and only competitive companies can increase employment and contribute to social goals.

2.3.4 The sustainability debate likes to work with images. One such image is of three pillars shoring up sustainable development, each equally warranted and each equal in value, one economic, one social and one environmental.

2.3.5 The three pillars are deemed to be closely linked, making it vital, when framing policy, not to jeopardise the existing balance. In economically difficult times in particular (such as those that Europe is currently experiencing), it is claimed that nothing should be done to upset industry. The view taken is that long-term growth is essential and that, if necessary, cutbacks might have to be made, at least for a time, in environmental protection or social policy.

2.3.6 A contrasting image to this pillar model is the paradigm of buoys in a waterway. The buoys indicate the environmental and social limits within which the ship (i.e. industry) can move freely, but it may not leave the waterway.

2.3.7 The Committee would urgently recommend that, as part of the sustainability debate, the Commission engage in robust debate on these images and the philosophies that lie behind them. The Committee does not doubt the need for a balanced relationship between economic, social and environmental considerations. The three dimensions, pillars or elements are intrinsically linked. The natural environment is essential as the basis and source for economic activity which can ensure social wealth and a higher quality of life, and therefore a stable and sound natural environment is a prerequisite for sustainable development. It is equally clear, however, that sustainable development is much more than 'just' traditional environment policy in a new guise using new methods.

2.3.8 The heads of state or government met in Rio in 1992 and in Johannesburg in 2002, because economic activity as it had operated up to then was clearly pushing various limits. It became clear that certain types of economic activity spawn social and environmental problems and that in trying to resolve these problems environmental protection technology is reaching its limits.

2.3.9 As part of the sustainable development strategy, therefore, the Committee feels it is right to discuss issues that have so far been seen as well-nigh taboo. One of these questions concerns permanent economic growth as the primary goal and the key aspect of all policies. The Committee has of course over the past few years consistently emphasised the importance of growth for economic development and has also backed a growth initiative as part of the Lisbon strategy.

2.3.9.1 However the Committee feels that, on the issue of growth, a distinction should increasingly be made. It is especially important to identify those areas in which growth is particularly desirable from a sustainability angle. One such area – and on this point the Commission agrees – is renewable energy. However, renewable energy often remains too expensive compared to less sustainable energy resources and is thus a problem for industry. The basic conditions have to be changed by dedicated policy instruments and it is up to the sustainable development strategy to identify and lay down in detail what needs to be done to bring that change about.

2.3.9.2 On the other hand, clearer mention should be made of those areas in which further growth is more undesirable and counterproductive. In Germany, EUR 40 billion are spent each year on so-called health costs<sup>(1)</sup> – the result of people's poor nutrition and reluctance to exercise. In terms of per-capita input into GDP, therefore, Germans on average contribute more simply by failing to take proper care of their health than Indians do through economic activity (some EUR 470 per year). Although it does create jobs, growth in this sector is not desirable from a sustainability angle. Seen in this light, sustainability may indeed be, in part, a constraining factor for economic growth. This example also shows that GDP alone, whilst it is a useful indicator of economic activity, is not (and does not claim to be) an appropriate indicator of social well-being or a yardstick for public or environmental health.

2.3.9.3 Growth, however, is not only a qualitative issue affecting Europe. It also has a global quantitative dimension. In its communication entitled *Europe's Environment*<sup>(2)</sup>, the Commission notes that, as globalisation continues, trade flows increase and western patterns of behaviour spread, per-capita GDP is set to rise by 40 % between 1990 and 2010 and by 140 % by 2050. Despite the transfer of technical know-how and environmental technologies, this 'may also have an impact on global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which are forecast to rise by a factor of three by 2050'. The climate disaster would be complete.

2.3.10 Another sustainability issue which the Commission should address in greater depth is the shape of future produc-

tivity trends. The Committee is glad to offer its services as a partner in this venture. There is no doubt that improving productivity is essential for businesses to press ahead with development. Productivity has always been seen as an engine for employment and prosperity, because high productivity has so far made it possible to offer more goods and services at lower prices, thus stimulating new demand and creating new jobs.

2.3.10.1 In purely economic terms, high productivity is not a sustainability indicator. To take one example: Brazil undoubtedly has, economically speaking, the most productive sugar industry in the world but that benefits only a few multinational companies; the local populace and the environment are exploited to the extreme.

2.3.10.2 Productivity, though, has to be redirected towards sustainable development. Productivity must not be measured only in terms of value of the product divided by its production cost, but evaluated in a broader context, complementing it with quality of life and less use of non-renewable resources at global level.

2.3.10.3 Future productivity trends should be used as an engine for sustainable development. Examples of productivity gains conducive to sustainable development include improvements in environmental performance and the more efficient use of raw materials and energy. Governments and the Community must initiate interventionist policies to give incentives that are consistent with this reorientation.

2.3.11 Thus, the sustainability debate should be more deliberately controversial than in the past, bringing together diametrically opposing viewpoints ('We need growth at any price' versus 'Growth cannot be sustainable' and 'Productivity growth is the mainspring of the economy' versus 'Productivity generates more and more problems for the environment and society'). This is because, far more than in other policy areas, sustainable development is contingent on a broad social consensus.

## 2.4 *The relationship between the Lisbon strategy and the sustainability strategy*

2.4.1 The Lisbon strategy is distinct from the sustainability strategy on three key points. It:

- clearly puts the focus on economic growth and economic reforms in order to achieve more and better jobs and social cohesion;

<sup>(1)</sup> In fact they are sickness-funding costs.

<sup>(2)</sup> COM(1999) 543 final, 24.11.1999, p. 21



- has a clear time limit (2010); and also
- has an almost purely European focus (its purpose is to make Europe the most competitive, knowledge-based economic area).

2.4.2 The Committee welcomed the addition, at the Gothenburg summit, of an environmental chapter to the Lisbon strategy, and the adoption of a sustainable development strategy – albeit with relatively limited content. <sup>(1)</sup> The fact that the Council only recently reiterated its call for environmental considerations to be incorporated more into the Lisbon strategy shows the shortcomings still existing on this front. Taking greater account of environmental protection can help to make the Lisbon strategy more consistent with the sustainability strategy, but it is clear that this will not automatically follow.

2.4.3 It should also be noted that important matters (such as distributive justice and intergenerational justice) that were considered at Rio and Johannesburg to be essential for sustainable development are not directly covered by the Lisbon strategy and will therefore not necessarily result from its implementation.

2.4.4 The two strategies must be coherent under the overarching objective of long-term sustainable development. This means that sustainable development objectives must permeate all policy areas of the Lisbon strategy. In this way, the Lisbon strategy can and should be an important intermediate step on the way to sustainable development, but cannot be a substitute for a long-term sustainability strategy.

2.4.5 The economic growth generated by the Lisbon strategy must be qualitative and decoupled from resource use to a greater extent, so that it is compatible with sustainable development. However, this also means that the Lisbon strategy can make an important contribution to the sustainability strategy if it helps refocus the economy on a more sustainable model.

2.4.6 It is essential therefore that, like other EU spending, investments in the context of the EU growth initiative meet the sustainability criteria. On that score, the Committee would point out that this issue has been widely examined within organised civil society <sup>(2)</sup>. The Committee recommends that, in a specific communication to the Council, the Parliament, the CoR and the EESC, the Commission should address the consis-

tency between EU investments (including those funded by the EIB) in transport, energy and other infrastructure projects and sustainable development policy.

### 3. The need to broaden the strategy

3.1 While the Committee certainly feels it is appropriate to home in on certain issues, it must nonetheless draw attention to the risk that key elements of sustainable development may thereby fall by the wayside. From the point of view of substance it is necessary to scrutinise the broad questions that were extensively discussed in Rio and Johannesburg, but which are barely touched on in the EU's current sustainability strategy (such as the influence our economic activity has on global poverty, distributive justice and intergenerational justice).

#### *Step up the debate on the social dimension*

3.2 In addition to the four policy areas ultimately addressed at Gothenburg, the plan of implementation adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio also picked up on issues such as poverty eradication. The draft sustainability strategy submitted to the Gothenburg European Council <sup>(3)</sup> also made the point that 'one in every six Europeans lives in poverty'. However, the Council did not address the two key social issues. <sup>(4)</sup> Sustainable development in the EU must not, however, focus only on poverty within the Union, but must also address the impact of our economic activity on global poverty and the chances for future generations. The Committee does not feel that adequate consideration has so far been given to the issues of distributive and intergenerational justice. The fact that development aid is running at less than half of the promised levels is just one sign that a great deal remains to be done before a coherent policy may be said to be in place. Nor can this shortcoming be offset by the Everything but arms or similar initiatives.

3.3 As well as the eradication of poverty, another key issue mentioned by the Commission in the first draft of its sustainable development strategy was population ageing. While both issues have been incorporated (at least verbally) into the Lisbon strategy, they are not included in the longer-term sustainable development strategy as this focuses on environmental issues. That must be remedied and the social dimension must be discussed in greater depth.

<sup>(1)</sup> Gothenburg European Council presidency conclusions, 15 and 16 June 2001, extracts from nos. 20 and 21: 'The European Council agrees a strategy for sustainable development which completes the Union's political commitment to economic and social renewal, adds a third, environmental dimension to the Lisbon strategy and establishes a new approach to policy making.' (...) 'Clear and stable objectives for sustainable development will present significant economic opportunities. This has the potential to unleash a new wave of technological innovation and investment, generating growth and employment.'

<sup>(2)</sup> See, among other things, the Investing for a sustainable future manifesto in which the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the Platform of European Social NGOs (Social Platform) put forward proposals

<sup>(3)</sup> Communication from the Commission: A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development, COM(2001) 264 final, 15.5.2001

<sup>(4)</sup> Poverty eradication and population ageing

3.4 Apart from the global issues mentioned above, the upcoming strategy must also focus on the question of employment and environment: what can be done to create new, skilled jobs through environmental protection and sustainable development?

3.5 Due to the high importance of the social dimension of sustainable development, the relations between social and economic-environmental issues must be discussed and expressed in concrete terms.

3.6 The EESC therefore underlines that the social dimension must be given very high attention in the review of the strategy for sustainable development. Any failure to do so will in the end harm the whole strategy and support for it.

3.7 The EESC proposes that the forthcoming review of the EU strategy for sustainable development pay particular attention, even beyond 2010, to four areas of the social dimension:

3.7.1 A sustainable working life focuses on quality of work within a full employment society. Quality of work is about creating a good working life throughout an individual's career. The increasing demands for mobility and flexibility must be met by deploying major resources on stimulating life-long learning and new adapted forms of social protection. Combining working life and family life must be made easier. At the workplace, priority must be given to health and safety, work organisation and working hours in order to increase worker satisfaction and self-confidence. Gender equality is one of the cornerstones of policies for improving quality of work.

3.7.2 The social and economic consequences of the ageing of the population need profound analysis in order to anticipate the changes in society and to adapt the policies required. Reforms have been taken or are underway in all Member States to achieve long-term sustainable pensions. In particular, the trend of retiring early before the age of 60 in many countries is putting pressure on pensions systems. Solidarity between generations has to be promoted. Policies must focus on welfare for children and their families in order to build the foundations for the welfare of the next generations. Too many children live in poverty, leave school early and have a bleak future. The Committee will draw up an opinion on relations between generations; the opinion will also focus on the role of the organised civil society in bridging generation gaps.

3.7.3 Society must be inclusive for all citizens, giving them rights and possibilities to achieve those rights. Eradication of poverty is a key objective. The homeless, drug addicts, criminals and other excluded groups must be reintegrated into society. Ethnic minorities, immigrants and other groups that risk exclusion are priority target groups for active policies for

social inclusion. Consistent and outreaching efforts to support education and training are among the most important tools. Shaping inclusion policies for all citizens is one of the crucial measures for improving possibilities for a good quality of life.

3.7.4 The issue of healthcare and new emerging health risks has become ever more urgent in recent years. The EU and the Member States have launched initiatives in response to alarming reports of health risks due to food, water, chemicals, tobacco etc. The EU for its part has responded with an umbrella programme to promote health and healthcare, and in particular programmes for fighting diseases caused by environmental factors and by erroneous lifestyles. There is, however, a lack of coordination and cooperation between the various programmes to support health and combat health risks. The Committee has underlined this in a number of opinions. According to the Committee, health safety is a collective obligation and a fundamental right for citizens. The Committee will prepare an opinion on this issue in order to draw conclusions from emergencies and devise an innovative approach of forward-looking analysis which will serve as a basis for future debate. In this context, the Committee will highlight the cost-benefit effects of resources spent on healthcare.

3.7.5 A Sustainable Social Development Charter covering the above fields and setting out the relevant fundamental rights of citizens could provide a great stimulus. It would have to be accompanied by an EU Action Programme, aiming at coordinating the various actions, and assist Member States in focusing priority areas. The Committee underlines that this approach could be of specific added value in the context of the present and future enlargement of the European Union.

#### *EU policy coherence*

3.8 The new strategy should also indicate how spending from the Structural Funds can be brought into line with the debate on sustainability in the new EU funding period (2007 onwards). 'Establishing sustainable development as an overarching objective of cohesion' (1) is an idea of the Commission that ought to be pursued. The Commission needs to give the recipients of the Structural Funds clear qualitative goals in order to improve coherence. The Committee is looking forward to the debate on the new financial perspective and the inclusion of tools and monitoring mechanisms to promote sustainability. It is no longer acceptable, for example, for the Commission to, on the one hand, criticise the thrust of transport policy when in practice it sometimes helps to finance it through the Structural Funds. These inconsistencies must be eliminated. When awarding subsidies, the EU must lay down sustainability conditions and see to it that these are met.

(1) COM(2003) 745 final, p. 34

3.9 Regional development in general in the Member States, which is co-financed via the Structural Funds, also requires close assessment, however. The largest single payment made to agriculture from the Structural Funds over the past few years has been a EUR 40 million investment grant for a large dairy plant in Saxony, Germany. Thanks to EU support and the use of cheap Czech milk, this large plant is one of the most efficient and productive in Europe. As part of the sustainability strategy, the Commission should consider whether support for the further centralisation of processing structures is always consistent with sustainability objectives. European taxpayers surely have the right to know whether investment projects co-financed by the EU are consistent with the sustainability concept. A kind of sustainability impact assessment is thus required.

3.10 Another aspect of policy coherence is to check whether research and development policy is fully consistent with the sustainability debate.

3.11 The same also applies to finance and tax policy, although the Committee is perfectly aware that this is a matter more for the Member States than for the EU. How does the stability pact fare on the sustainability front? Can new tax initiatives foster sustainability? <sup>(1)</sup> The EESC calls on the Commission to directly incorporate environmental and social criteria in any reform of the stability and growth pact and to make these just as binding as the economic and financial criteria. As regards the development of the use of economic instruments, more environmental taxes and charges have been used in the last few years, and there is a slow but growing move towards environmental tax reform as some countries change their tax base, reducing labour-related taxes and increasing taxes and charges on environmental pollution, resources and services <sup>(2)</sup>.

3.11.1 The planning and implementation of public procurement projects which support sustainable development would make its mark, as public procurement accounts for 16 % of EU GDP and would certainly also send out a signal to, for instance, businesses or private households.

3.12 Moreover, the Committee feels there is no doubt that the role of business is crucial in progressing towards sustainable development. It believes the EU should draw up and commit itself to a policy of sustainable production and consumption on the basis of a dialogue and

partnership between the European business community and public authorities in line with the conclusions of the Johannesburg World Summit. The aim would be to encourage measures to promote efficiency in products and production processes and to encourage sustainable patterns of consumptions in order to optimise resource use and minimise waste. Business organisations at European level <sup>(3)</sup> should be encouraged to take up a leadership role in promoting sustainable patterns of production and consumption that meet societal needs within environmental limits.

#### 4. The consequence of enlargement

4.1 It was not sustainable development, but the adoption of the *acquis* that was the subject of the accession negotiations. It is beyond doubt that the problems that need to be addressed by sustainable development arose within the framework of the law and not outside it.

4.2 As members of the United Nations, virtually all the new Member States have worked out a national sustainable development strategy. As with the current EU Member States, there are considerable inconsistencies between the sustainability strategies and actual policy on the ground (see point 5 below).

4.3 The EESC has dealt with the economic, social and environmental problems of the future Member States and the applicant countries in many of its opinions. It agrees with the Commission that, on the one hand, the environmental situation has already radically improved in part or can be expected to do so in the future as a result of technical improvements, such as the installation of filters or the construction of sewage treatment works. On the other hand, some clearly unsustainable trends can be observed <sup>(4)</sup>.

4.4 The example of - in some cases disastrous - energy efficiency, for example in buildings, illustrates that resource conservation, protection of the environment and job creation - particularly in SMEs - could definitely go hand in hand. However, there is no sign of policies in the accession countries adopting an appropriate strategy.

4.5 Rather, the trend in the future Member States and the applicant countries seems to be towards the relatively rapid adoption of the patterns of production and consumption that are common in the EU, and with them the sustainability problems that the EU is currently trying to address.

<sup>(1)</sup> It is strange, for instance, that across Europe, human labour (despite its oversupply) is heavily taxed while the environment (which is becoming increasingly depleted) is subject to virtually no tax at all.

<sup>(2)</sup> See, for example, the latest Eurostat publication: Environmental Taxes in the European Union 1980-2001: First signs of a relative 'green tax shift' - Eurostat 2003

<sup>(3)</sup> Based, for instance, on the example set globally by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development

<sup>(4)</sup> In areas such as transport and agriculture. For example, the biggest pork producer in the USA (Smithfield) is currently investing in gigantic pig farms in Poland, which has nothing to do with sustainable (or multifunctional) agriculture.

4.6 It will be particularly important to let the people in the new Member States and the applicant countries know that sustainable development will benefit them, too, and does not mean giving up their newly-gained 'quality of life'. Failure to do this alone could make the implementation of the EU's sustainability strategy more difficult for the simple reason that the relevant Commission initiatives could meet with increasing resistance from representatives of the new Member States and the applicant countries in the Council.

4.7 At EU level, it is vital to lay down conditions and to see to it that sustainability become a factor in the distribution of financial support. Information must be provided at political level and in public administrations in the new Member States in order to give practical assistance to the appropriate authorities in their decision-making (<sup>1</sup>).

## 5. The link between the EU strategy and national and local strategies

5.1 Sustainable development is not a matter for the EU alone. There is no doubt that the EU plays a significant role; however, Member States, regions, businesses and individual citizens also have a share of the responsibility. In future, there needs to be better integration of all areas of activity and it is essential that the specific responsibilities, powers and remits of individual political and administrative players be clearly set out and interlinked as part of coordinated strategies. Now that more or less all the Member States – including four of the new Member States – have developed their own sustainability strategies, it would be worthwhile evaluating these national strategies, assessing their effectiveness, and examining the extent to which they are consistent and how they stand in relation to the EU's sustainability strategy.

5.2 Without wishing to pre-empt any detailed study of the issue, it is clear that national strategies' approaches to sustainability vary widely. Some strategies focus on the environmental dimension, while others address the three facets of sustainability and present overall strategies for future social development. Most national strategies were certainly not framed as a means of implementing the EU strategy but were drawn up nationally to meet the Rio commitment on national sustainable development strategies. Nonetheless, the key elements of the EU strategy are also reflected in most of the national strategies. As these strategies have different priorities and are at different stages in their implementation – and also vary in terms of participation and revision arrangements – the Committee expects that a detailed study will provide extensive comparative material and establish a good basis for mutual learning and the transfer of best practices. The Committee is ready to cooperate

(<sup>1</sup>) The Committee provides practical information on this issue in its opinion, currently in the pipeline, on appropriate environmental technologies in the new Member States.

with national sustainable development councils and their umbrella organisation, the European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEAC) network in order to stimulate such exchanges or provide a clearing house for the exchange of information and best practices.

5.3 Not only transport and energy policy, but also important EU reforms in 2003, clearly demonstrate how necessary it is for the EU and the Member States to work together in harmony. As part of the agricultural reform, Agricultural Commissioner Fischler proposed redesignating 20 % of the resources from the first pillar to rural development and agro-environmental measures. This policy would certainly have been a move towards sustainable development. However, the Member States decided in favour a much smaller modulation. Also as part of the agricultural reform, the EU has given Member States scope to divert 10 % of the funds that have hitherto taken the form of direct farm payments, to measures in support of sustainable development. It appears that, when they come to implement the Luxembourg decisions, no Member State will take up that option. In fisheries policy, too, where the current unsustainable policy is now threatening not only fish stocks, but also the livelihoods of fishermen, it took a very long time to reach agreement on conservation measures. This demonstrates the need for very close cooperation in drawing up and implementing sustainability policy.

5.4 While the overall conditions for sustainable development need to be put in place via the European and national strategies, much of the practical implementation will be done at regional and local level. Appropriate objectives and measures must be worked out as part of the Local Agenda 21 in close collaboration with the responsible policymakers and organised civil society. Sustainable development is impossible without a 'bottom-up' approach of this kind.

5.5 The Committee thus also considers sustainable development as an area of practical social and economic activity on all levels. Sustainable development establishes a wide-ranging framework for action, which, however, requires specific knowledge and skills. It is a framework that is geared very strongly towards knowledge and awareness. So far, neither European education systems nor informal education have done enough to help get the message across.

5.6 Hence, sustainable development – both as a framework for action and an end in itself – must be incorporated in particular into education and training, and thus become something that, in principle, every individual has to aim for and work on in his or her immediate (geographical and social) environment.

5.7 EU sustainable development policies are thus particularly important within the Union as they can give an enormous boost to local trends and measures on this front at local level.

5.8 One issue that should, in the Committee's view, be addressed with the highest priority is the refocusing of the aforementioned EU policies in order to kick-start the framing and promotion of comprehensive sustainable development schemes at local level. The Committee therefore proposes that particular support be given to those programmes that are based on cooperation between organised civil society and local authorities and are designed on an individual basis to achieve specific and measurable (quantitative and qualitative) objectives by drawing on authoritative knowledge, education and lifelong learning.

## 6. External aspects

6.1 The future competitiveness of economies is, of course, a key issue. Stringently pursuing a policy that has sustainable development as its target and leads, for example, to the introduction of the latest environmental technology or the internalising of external costs, etc., can or indeed must produce competitive disadvantages if, on the one hand, other economies fully or partly ignore the principles of sustainability and, on the other hand, these disadvantages are not compensated for in trade.

6.2 The scenario outlined in the previous paragraph is precisely the situation the EU now faces. The refusal of the USA and Russia to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, and indeed the Bush administration's stated intention to defer some environmental legislation in order to stimulate the economy, is a clear indication that one of the most important economic powers in the world prefers an apparently different and unsustainable kind of development.

6.3 It will be all the more important to increase the pressure during international negotiations on those countries that have rejected the principles of sustainability to a greater or lesser extent. They should be persuaded – as far as possible – to live up to their responsibility and to introduce measures to ensure sustainable development.

6.4 However, this is not sufficient. The EESC has already examined this fundamental problem in its opinion on the future of the CAP.<sup>(1)</sup> The Commission must therefore work – much harder than it has done hitherto – to ensure that, for example, sustainability criteria such as clear environmental, animal welfare and social standards are integrated into the WTO negotiations as a matter of urgency. Sustainability therefore has to do not only with production and consumption but

also to a very large extent with international trade. However, in the WTO, much too little account has so far been taken of sustainability considerations.

6.5 Just as it is necessary to accept developing countries' argument that they no longer wish to suffer, for example, from agricultural subsidies, so too must other countries accept that the EU can no longer tolerate the abandonment of domestic production because it cannot compete with rival products that are produced using methods that distort competition and are unacceptable from a sustainability angle; to illustrate this, the EESC points to the above-mentioned example of sugar (see point 2.3.10.1).

6.6 The EU's revised sustainability strategy should give thorough consideration to this policy area and set out an appropriate strategy<sup>(2)</sup>.

6.7 A strategy of this kind also involves, among other things, forming coalitions with countries prepared to make joint moves towards sustainable development. This might include in particular the ACP countries with which the EU enjoys special relations.

6.8 The EU sustainability debate has its roots in earlier UN efforts on this front, which, in turn, also spawned national strategies. In the long run, these different strands cannot operate separately, but need to be linked up. The new EU sustainability strategy should set out how the various tiers (international, EU, national, regional and local) can be merged to form a coherent policy.

6.8.1 At Johannesburg, the EU committed itself not only to existing international development targets, including those laid down in the Millennium Declaration, but also to a number of new and quantifiable detailed objectives and to the world summit's plan of implementation. That must be reflected in the EU sustainability strategy.

## 7. Discuss the need to set clearer strategic objectives and indicators

7.1 The Committee supports the Commission's opinion that 'the likelihood that ... strategies succeed increases if they include:

- objectives that are quantified as far as possible, and measures;
- European, national, regional and local components;
- indicators for monitoring progress and evaluating the effectiveness of policies'.<sup>(3)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the future of the CAP, OJ C 125, 27.5.2002, p. 87-99 This states: 'In principle, the Committee therefore expects that world trade policy must enable societies or economic areas to protect their producers and customers against products which were either not produced in accordance with the sustainable production rules recognised and practised in their areas or which do not meet imposed standards.'

<sup>(2)</sup> See point 2.2.5, which pointed out that a strategy needs to take account of foreseeable difficulties from the outset.

<sup>(3)</sup> COM(1999) 543 final, p. 23

7.2 A more in-depth sustainability strategy must make clear that there will be structural changes (and what these are likely to be), but that in the long term, these changes to the framework will be good for employment, social justice and the environment. Enough clear and readily understandable indicators should be laid down in each of the various fields (economic, environmental and social) in order to monitor progress on the road to sustainable development. The Committee considers that work currently being done by Eurostat is going in the right direction. It rejects the ideas that have been mooted in the context of the Lisbon strategy, such as that of reducing the number of indicators (in the case of environmental protection, going as far as to reduce the indicators to one, namely CO<sub>2</sub> emissions). The European Environment Agency's core set of environmental indicators can help to complement the structural indicators.

7.3 As well as using indicators to identify development trends, scenarios should be also be drawn up for use in establishing so-called 'milestones'. As sustainable development has no final objective, all the stakeholders involved must be clearly made aware of the direction of the venture and the ultimate impact of various development trends on, for instance, a particular economic sector or on the daily lives of ordinary people.

7.4 The Committee recommends that extensive benchmarking be conducted and that a list be drawn up of good and bad examples of sustainable development.

## 8. How to improve the implementation procedure

8.1 In this opinion, the Committee stresses that the reasons for insufficient progress include a poor understanding of what sustainable development actually is, the resultant fears and resistance in the sectors potentially affected, and the absence of any clear short-, medium- and long-term objectives, with the result that sustainability is not properly incorporated into all the relevant policy areas. Addressing these shortcomings should also facilitate implementation.

8.2 As the 2003 Brussels European Council made clear, 'in order to deliver the full set of reforms proposed in Gothenburg, it is crucial that the EU institutions and the Member States take action to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of existing processes, strategies and instruments'.<sup>(1)</sup> The European Council made particular reference to the Cardiff process, decoupling objectives and structural indicators, together with the need to monitor progress and identify best practices<sup>(2)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> Brussels European Council presidency conclusions, 20 and 21 March 2003, no. 57

<sup>(2)</sup> *ibid*

8.3 Under the Gothenburg decisions, the Commission had already been asked to make their proposals more coherent by subjecting them to a sustainability impact assessment. Last year, the Commission introduced a detailed impact assessment, modelled on the sustainability impact assessment already in use in trade policy. The detailed impact assessment is made by the appropriate Commission departments and serves to underpin and substantiate Commission proposals. The examples so far fail, as yet, to provide a sufficiently integrated view of the issues at hand, but focus too much on cost-benefit analyses. For its part, the sustainability impact assessment is conducted as a joint venture with the relevant stakeholders.

8.4 The Committee notes that the road map on the follow-up to the Gothenburg conclusions has not been updated. The Committee is unaware of any preliminary work in this field despite the fact that the road map is due for review at the 2004 spring European Council<sup>(3)</sup>. It is not surprising, however, that the absence of clear objectives makes it impossible to draw up a road map.

8.5 A stocktake of the Cardiff process is also due at the 2004 spring European Council<sup>(4)</sup>. The Committee expects the stocktake – that is, regrettably not available on time – to say that the sectoral strategies of the various Council formations have so far existed largely on paper.

8.6 There is a clear need for a much greater degree of political commitment to the long-term aim of sustainable development. At EU level this requires a much clearer, better coordinated approach to policymaking on sustainable development within the European Commission. The Commission should produce an annual sustainable development report. It also requires a much greater commitment to making the Cardiff Process function effectively and that specific Councils (energy, competitiveness, economic, transport, agriculture, etc.) prepare annual reports to indicate progress towards a more sustainable approach in their own policy areas. The European Parliament should set up a procedure to allow itself to have a coordinated approach to sustainable development issues. The European Economic and Social Committee should be encouraged to stimulate debate on sustainable development issues and to work in close cooperation with national sustainable development councils to step up the level of public debate and involvement on sustainable development.

## 9. Recommendations for a consultation and communication strategy on sustainable development

9.1 In all its documents, the Commission recognises the importance of communication. In the conclusions from Gothenburg, the European Council emphasises the 'importance of consulting widely with all relevant stakeholders' (point 23).

<sup>(3)</sup> Brussels European Council presidency conclusions, 20 and 21 March 2003, no. 58

<sup>(4)</sup> *ibid*.

9.2 In its sustainability strategy (<sup>1</sup>), the Commission writes, among other things: 'There are concerns that the policy responses have been driven more by narrow sectional interests than the wider interests of society. This perception is part of a wider malaise. Many believe that policy has become too technocratic and remote, and is too much under the influence of vested interests. To tackle this rising disaffection with the political process, policy making must become more open. An open policy process also allows any necessary trade-offs between competing interests to be clearly identified, and decisions taken in a transparent way. Earlier and more systematic dialogue – in particular with representatives of consumers, whose interests are too often overlooked – may lengthen the time taken to prepare a policy proposal, but should improve the quality of regulation and accelerate its implementation.'

9.3 Communication and consultation are two different things. The Committee considers it vital, first of all, to draft the future new sustainability strategy in very close collaboration with the parties concerned, i.e. with the Member States (in order to secure better link-up between the strategies) and with civil society. Selling an internally drafted strategy to the outside world is not enough. The strategy must be the fruit of open consultation and coordination if, when presented in its new and eminently practical guise, it is to meet with the requisite broad acceptance and support.

9.4 The Committee considers it absolutely essential that a much more participatory process should be used in future to develop the sustainability strategy. It recalls that the draft sustainability strategy that formed the basis for the discussions in Gothenburg was published just two months after the consultation document. The discussions that are urgently required in order to reach a broad social consensus (see points 2.2 and 2.3) need far more time than they have hitherto been allowed.

9.4.1 This exploratory opinion can definitely be seen as a first step in a participatory process of this kind. The Committee trusts that the undertaking to publish a relevant draft in May/June 2004 will be honoured. Civil society should then be given enough time to discuss the draft. The Committee considers three months at least to be an appropriate time frame.

9.4.2 To keep a watch on the further drafting of the new strategy, a stakeholder forum should be convened, similar to the one staged for the strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources.

9.4.3 Finally, the outcome of the consultation process should be discussed with the parties involved. Not until that has been done should the new Commission adopt the new sustainability strategy. It should then draw up its policy programme in the light of the new sustainability strategy.

(<sup>1</sup>) COM(2001) 264 final, p. 9 (under the heading 'Improve communication and mobilise citizens and businesses')

9.4.4 The Committee is happy to keep an eye on and support this process, and accepts Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström's offer (<sup>2</sup>) to organise the consultation process jointly with the Commission.

9.5 As already stated in point 2 above, efforts should be made in the next few months to deepen the sustainability strategy and to give it practical form. It is vital to give the strategy substance as people can be guided by clear goals but not by visions.

9.6 In future, information on the strategy should also be greatly improved – among other things, all the measures should be summarised in a single document.

9.7 The Committee would also like to see better coordination in future between the sustainability debate and education/training and research policy. Judicious coordination between education/training and the sustainability debate also means, indirectly, that everyone has an opportunity to take part in the process.

9.7.1 Education/training policy, which can certainly be understood as part of the communication strategy, will focus in particular on developing long-term, joined-up thinking within a social context.

9.7.2 The analysis of unsustainable trends in our societies is most often made within a timeframe of five to ten years, and seldom beyond that. This is understandable, bearing in mind the difficulties. At the same time, measures for promoting more sustainable development will often have to work within timeframes of fifteen to twenty years or more (generations). This illustrates one of the profound problems in tackling unsustainable trends and measures to combat them: the lack of scientifically reliable methods for outlining alternative scenarios. Consideration should be given to the creation of an EU long-term policy think-tank on sustainable development and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. Sustainable development has to rely, of necessity, on alternative scenarios covering a number of issues and trends, and on critical thinking. The Committee proposes that in the revised sustainable development strategy, a special research effort is included for the development of comprehensive sustainable development simulation models. These must indicate not only the social and economic impacts of a rigorous sustainable development policy, but also the social and environmental effects that the failure to halt unsustainable trends is likely to have.

(<sup>2</sup>) See speech at the EESC, 17 March 2004

9.7.3 The modernising of workplaces and the introduction of environmental-friendly technologies will have effects on the level of employees' education and training. The more advanced the production methods, the more hierarchical structures are broken down, and the greater the need for in-service training and lifelong education for everyone in the labour market. A society marked by an ambition to think and act in terms of sustainable development must be a society marked by high levels of education and training.

9.7.4 Without doubt, a knowledge-intensive society is, in the long run, a sine qua non of sustainable development. Yet it is also a consequence of it. This means, inter alia, that the education systems must include much more knowledge about the issues of unsustainable trends. An understanding of the challenges will add to the understanding of measures to be taken.

Brussels, 28 April 2004.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Roger BRIESCH

---

APPENDIX

**to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee**

The following amendments, which received at least one quarter of the votes cast, were rejected in the course of the discussion (Rule 39(2) of the Rules of Procedure).

**Point 2.1.3:**

At the end of the second sentence, add:

'... to social and economic aspects.'

*Outcome of the vote*

For: 37, against: 51, abstentions: 8.

**Point 2.3.10.1:**

delete

*Outcome of the vote*

For: 33, against: 65, abstentions: 2.

**Point 2.3.10.2:**

delete

*Outcome of the vote*

For: 33, against: 62, abstentions: 3.

**Point 3.6:**

delete

*Outcome of the vote*

For: 32, against: 53, abstentions: 6.

---