



The Revised Draft of the European Sustainable Development Strategy.

Intervention on behalf of the EEAC Working Group on Sustainable Development

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EEAC is pleased that the Austrian Presidency has continued the tradition of inviting EEAC members to be present at these regular meetings to discuss progress on sustainable development in Europe. We believe that the interaction between responsible officials and informed advisers creates a constructive dialogue that helps to push the sustainable development debate forward.

EEAC's Working Group on Sustainable Development met in Salzburg on May 31 and took the opportunity to review the current state of play on the European Sustainable Development Strategy. This intervention reflects the common views of all the members of the Working Group present at that meeting.

We should like to congratulate the Presidency - and all the true friends of the Presidency – on having worked so hard to achieve a new strategy for sustainable development for Europe. We hope that this work will now be brought to a successful conclusion at the European Summit, and that vigorous efforts will then be made by all parties to communicate the strategy and to implement it.

We believe that it is crucial that the Heads of Government themselves should adopt the strategy at the Council meeting and should commit themselves to giving their personal leadership and commitment to the task of driving the strategy forward.

When we look at the emerging draft of the strategy against the recommendations which EEAC participants made at the Kinsale meeting two years ago and in several other documents, we have to say that we remain disappointed that the strategy is not more comprehensive and ambitious in some areas. It does not fully measure up to the challenges and to the unsustainability of many current activities and trends in our societies. It does not convey the urgency of the problems, the radical solutions that will be needed in the future and the depth of political and societal commitment that will be needed to bring about those necessary changes. It does not engage seriously with the task of ensuring that the more narrowly based Lisbon agenda is properly integrated into a sustainable development approach.

We like the shape and structure of the new strategy and we agree with the seven areas identified for priority action. But on most of these the strategy does not represent a significant move forward. Most of the targets and commitments that it does make are little more than a restatement of commitments already made elsewhere. Much more will be needed in the future to achieve sustainability in these key areas.

We consider therefore that the current draft should be regarded as no more than the beginning in charting a course for the long journey towards a more sustainable society and economy. It is certainly vital that the limited commitments that are made in this strategy are fully and honestly met as the Union and its members move into the implementation stage. But it will be important that this strategy be regarded as the floor or base to which further initiatives and commitments can be added in due course as opportunities arise and in any future reviews of the strategy. It

also remains important that further efforts be made to integrate the Lisbon strategy more effectively into a broader sustainable development framework, and that the Lisbon emphasis on innovation should be well directed towards advancing sustainable development targets.

On the side of process and governance we see and applaud a greater degree of progress. We are glad to recognise and welcome the significant new machinery for promoting and communicating sustainable development and the strategy and for reviewing and co-ordinating progress. We want to encourage a much greater effort throughout Europe to build sustainable development more securely into all levels of the systems for education, communication, participation and awareness. We want sustainable development to become the ethically supported common base for assessment of new policies, projects and programmes at all levels, and for sustainability impact assessments to be applied in an appropriate manner (see also EEAC's Working Group Governance statement on Impact Assessment, May 2006; www.eeac-net.org).

We are glad to see the commitment to a regular biennial review of progress based on objective indicators of some of the key trends. We think that there will need to be reports on progress from each country to feed into this process, and our members will be glad to play a part in evaluating these reports – as well as in the peer reviews that are envisaged.

We are of course particularly glad to see the recognition given to the role of National Councils and to our own network, EEAC. Our network would be glad to play a part in helping to promote sustainable development in individual member states, and in the establishment of advisory stakeholder councils in countries that do not yet have them. We shall also want to work as hard as we can to continue stimulating debate and involving stakeholders as well as contributing to the processes of monitoring and progress review at national and EU level. ,

In broad terms we conceive our role as providing some kind of quality check or assurance on the validity and adequacy of the strategies and other measures taken at national and European level. We shall endeavour to keep the long term vision of sustainability in full view of all policy levels, and to use this longer term vision to critique and continually extend the more limited shorter term targets and objectives set out in the strategy and related initiatives. We foresee that there will be a need for firmer commitments in some areas in the future and for new measures embodying binding rules and obligations to deliver some of the key targets.

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