



The Annemasse Declaration

December 20, 2006

*The International Symposium **Building the Governance of Sustainable Development. European solidarities for the New Member States** was held on 23-24 November 2006 at Annemasse-Geneva. It brought together close to 150 delegates, including local stakeholders (assembly members, NGOs) and representatives from local networks and groupings, together with governments and EU officials, experts, industry and business operators from the 10 new EU member or accession countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) and Switzerland.*

As this symposium adjourns, the organisers put forward the following concluding proposals. They call upon local stakeholders (the citizen, elected representatives, community organisations, NGOs and trade unions) as well as their own national and European network, national and EU public authorities, together with research and expert bodies as well as economic and business operators to participate in the consultation that is about to be launched about the following proposals.

A number of preliminary remarks are in order :

- Over the past 20 years or so, the new member States have achieved substantial economic, social and political change. These changes pave the way for the promotion of Europe- and world-wide sustainable development.
- The new member States bring exceptional environmental riches, particularly as far as biodiversity is concerned, as well as conditions that are conducive to more favourable rates of urbanisation and more sustainable individual consumption levels. These assets must be included into EU strategies and be recognised as commitments to sustainability.
- New member States have already gone some way along the path to more active public participation in democratic life, particularly through development of legislative frameworks and deployment of governance networks. Still, awareness of EU strategies for sustainable development remains poor, both with the citizenry and their elected representatives. The upshot is a certain lack of political will and commitment as far as sustainable resolution of local, regional and national issues is concerned.
- The actions taken by the new member States, including the latest two (Bulgaria and Romania) in favour of sustainable development keep gaining strength ; still, all these worthy efforts lack consistency, regardless of the existing EU framework and in particular the European strategy for sustainable development as set out by the 2001 EU summit in Göteborg.
- France has been very actively involved in cultural cooperation, particularly as far as French-speaking countries are concerned; at the moment however, France is not doing enough with regard to sustainable development, the other major area for EU cooperation; and yet it has accumulated a wealth of experience in areas such as agriculture, water management, research and the interlinkages between culture and nature which she should be sharing with others, and new member States in particular.

- With respect to cultural cooperation within Europe, France's natural inclination and tradition is to involve regional authorities ; for instance, a number of French regions, such as Rhône-Alpes, Burgundy, Alsace, Nord Pas-de-Calais are into partnerships for cultural cooperation. Here again, these arrangements hardly ever include sustainable development.
- Nevertheless, sustainable development opens up a new area for cooperation in its own right, and for a number of reasons : solidarity over environmental issues mitigates historical tensions and helps overcome time-honoured dividing lines (indeed, the atmosphere, or water, are common goods, which we must preserve lest we trigger conflicts over access to scarce resources); the EU integration strategy highlights economic growth and competitiveness (particularly with the 2001 Lisbon Agenda) which can be – and on occasion is – a source of competition and rivalries; whereas sustainable development favours co-mingling and cooperation which bring together economic, social and environmental issues. This can only further emphasise the need to implement the European strategy for sustainable development. In particular, the EU's "common market" should be seen as an opportunity to reinforce "sustainable" consumption patterns of behaviour in the new member States.
- The new member States bring to the table more significant assets than older members at times realise, and these assets open up opportunities to contribute their own experiences and to further cooperation. Indeed, EU cooperation stands as an effective source of exchange and partnerships from older to newer members and conversely.
- The rapid pace of development in new member States and the many financial transfers they benefit from often focus on the strictly economic aspect of sustainable development, to the detriment of the environmental and social issues that cannot be dissociated from them. Now these aspects must be effectively taken into account as ecological challenges keep mounting. Effective action must take place in the forthcoming 10 years. This might start off with the creation and the strengthening of NGO networks between older and newer member States.

Consequently, the organisers of the symposium and their European partners

make the following recommendations :

1. For all the encouraging riches of regional and local cooperation arrangements (international institutions, the EU Council of Regions, United Cities, Cities Associations, etc.), its proliferation also bears witness to the current piecemeal pattern of initiatives that is making cooperation with new member States difficult to control. Therefore, there seems to be a case for bringing all those initiatives together prior to taking stock of the available means of promoting them.
2. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have a critical role to play in the process of sustainable development: best practice in this area must be identified, advertised and held as an example to be replicated across Europe.
3. Research and development efforts in the area of sustainable development, and particularly with regard to renewable energies, must be shared across the EU instead of being conducted in a fragmented sort of way. Pioneering bilateral efforts (such as the joint Franco-Hungarian Biotechnology Institute in Szeged) should become multilateral, as should those deployed with regard to eco-innovation (such as undertaken, e.g., by France's Rhône-Alpes region). European Commission support and appropriate funding must be provided.
4. Sustainable development could also provide the rationale for « twinning » schemes between European cities and territories modelled on those already existing in the cultural area.
5. Also, in order would be a meeting of major European companies to discuss the opportunities for fresh partnerships deriving from EU enlargement.
6. A dedicated cooperation fund for those NGOs operating in new member States should also be set up, following the British and German examples. This is an idea which association Vraiment Durable will advocate with the French and EU authorities.
7. Cooperative schemes must also be organised in order to educate and train the citizenry with regard to the challenges of, and pathways to, sustainable development. This is an absolute prerequisite for a more participatory type of democracy where well-informed citizens are effectively listened to and therefore can participate in decision-making. Thus type of cooperation can happen at a variety of echelons, from schools to vocational training to wider-ranging awareness campaigns.
8. Within this framework, the EU strategy for sustainable development must be clarified, and made both more visible and easier to enforce, if everyone at every level (including national, local, individual and collective) is to be able to share in and further its objectives. Consequently, the EU strategy for sustainable development must be more widely advertised, with the main objectives, and the practical ways and means to achieve them, clearly identified, along with an extensive survey of capacities.
9. Additional cooperative schemes must be organised if the EU strategy for sustainable development is to become operational at local level. The instruments to be mobilised by central and local governments must be determined through experience-sharing between older and newer member States. Moreover, all ongoing local strategies must be made consistent with the EU strategy.
10. As part of this, cooperation must include the definition of sustainable development indicators to be shared by all member countries while taking into account national and regional specificities.
11. Economic growth in new member countries - as supported by a rise in household consumption that is fully legitimate given their historical background – calls for active cooperation with regard to higher awareness of the need for sustainable consumption.
12. Cooperation for sustainable development also calls for sharing of best practice. In particular, new member States are responsible for both the preservation of vast natural expanses and huge capital expenditure in long-term development projects that must be sustainable, not to mention the rehabilitation of dilapidated sites.

In conclusion, the organisers of the Symposium and their European partners:

- Call on newer and older member States to join a network in progress that will focus on the junctures between the various levels of participatory governance for sustainable development and the implementation of the EU strategy.
- Emphasise the importance of good neighbourhood policies in environmental issues. Therefore, the process that is about to be launched in the aftermath of the Symposium will not be exclusive of countries sitting right outside EU borders, without whose input there can be non consistency in environmental cooperation.
- Urge network participants to share best practice in a long-term perspective where every Member State will be consulted in turn, with NGOs as the focal points for debate.
- Request the support of the European Commission, international donor agencies, regional institutions and other EU member countries in the process of cooperation and solidarity in favour of EU governance for sustainable development.
- An initial assessment of these commitments will take place in late 2007 at Annemasse, on the eve of the first EU presidency by a new member State, with Europe's major NGOs, the main donor agencies (the European Commission, OECD, EBRD, the European Environmental Agency and the Council of Europe) attending, along with representatives from all other EU member States.

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