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**The review
of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy**

First meeting of the
Working Group on Sustainable Development Indicators
Meeting of 5-6 April 2006
Luxembourg, BECH Building Quetelet Room

THE REVIEW OF THE EU SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Sustainable development (SD) is a fundamental objective of the Treaty of the European Union (Art. 2). It is an overarching concept guiding all Union policies, actions and strategies and requires economic, environmental and social policies to be designed and implemented in a mutually reinforcing way. A broad EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) was launched by the European Council in Gothenburg in June 2001. In 2002, an external dimension was added by the European Council in Barcelona.

The European Commission is committed to review the EU SDS at the beginning of each new Commission's mandate. On 13 December 2005 it presented a communication (SDI/WG/4) which is the culmination of the review process launched in 2004 and contains four closely related elements, forming a package and the basis for further negotiations:

- The Communication itself proposing six priority issues, the integration of the external dimension into internal policy making as well as an effective monitoring procedure and follow-up process. It is accompanied by a progress report measuring the recent developments since the adoption of the Strategy (Eurostat publication);
- Guiding Principles for SD adopted in June 2005 by the European Council;
- Objectives, Targets, Policies and Actions;
- A Commission Communication adopted in February 2005, taking stock of progress and proposing first orientations;

In December 2005 the European Council noted the presentation of the Commission's communication on a renewed EU SDS for the next 5 years and looked forward to adopting in June 2006 an "ambitious and comprehensive strategy, comprising targets, indicators and an effective monitoring procedure, which should integrate the internal and external dimensions and be based on a positive long-term vision, bringing together the Community's sustainable development priorities and objectives in a clear, coherent strategy that can be communicated simply and effectively to citizens".

1. THE COMMISSION PACKAGE

The Commission Communication (COM(2005) 658) proposes various solutions to further develop the EU Sustainable Development Strategy:

- It generally confirms the key issues identified in 2001: Climate change and clean energy, Public health, Social exclusion, demography and migration, Management of natural resources, Sustainable transport, Global poverty and development challenges. The main difference is that the priority on Ageing Society is incorporated to issues on social exclusion. It also suggests the main actions or remind the main commitments taken by the EU;
- The external dimension of SD is associated as closely as possible to internal objectives. Global poverty has become one of the 6 priorities;

- It suggests ways to measure progress and regularly review priorities. A cycle of 2 years is proposed. Eurostat report should be published every second year (next issue: end 2007) and serve as an input to the general progress report of the Commission. It also proposes a role for each institution (Council, Parliament, EESC, and Committee of the Regions). The Strategy should be reviewed in 2009.
- It recommends a continuous dialogue/involvement of the civil society.
- It incorporates the Declaration on Guiding Principles of June 2005 and the initial Communication of February 2005.

The Communication was transmitted to both the Council and Parliament.

2. THE APPROACH OF THE AUSTRIAN PRESIDENCY

Given the cross-cutting nature of SD, the Austrian Presidency has set-up a Friends-of-the-Presidency-Group (FoP), which will review the Strategy. Each Member State can take part in this group, in which the Commission is represented by the Secretariat-General. Eurostat will attend the meeting of 10 April which will be dedicated to indicators.

In order to take into account the sectoral nature of the SDS, the Presidency has mobilised a broad range of Council formations (Environment, Transport, External Relations, Agriculture and Fishery, ECOFIN, Education, Employment and Social Affairs, Health and Consumer protection, Energy).

The debates will be based on a few questions (general or specific) to all Council formations. On the basis of these contributions the adoption of the renewed strategy is foreseen for the European Council in June 2006 (as an annex to the Conclusions of the European Council). A first draft should be circulated by the end of April 2006. The opinions expressed by the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions will be also taken into account.