

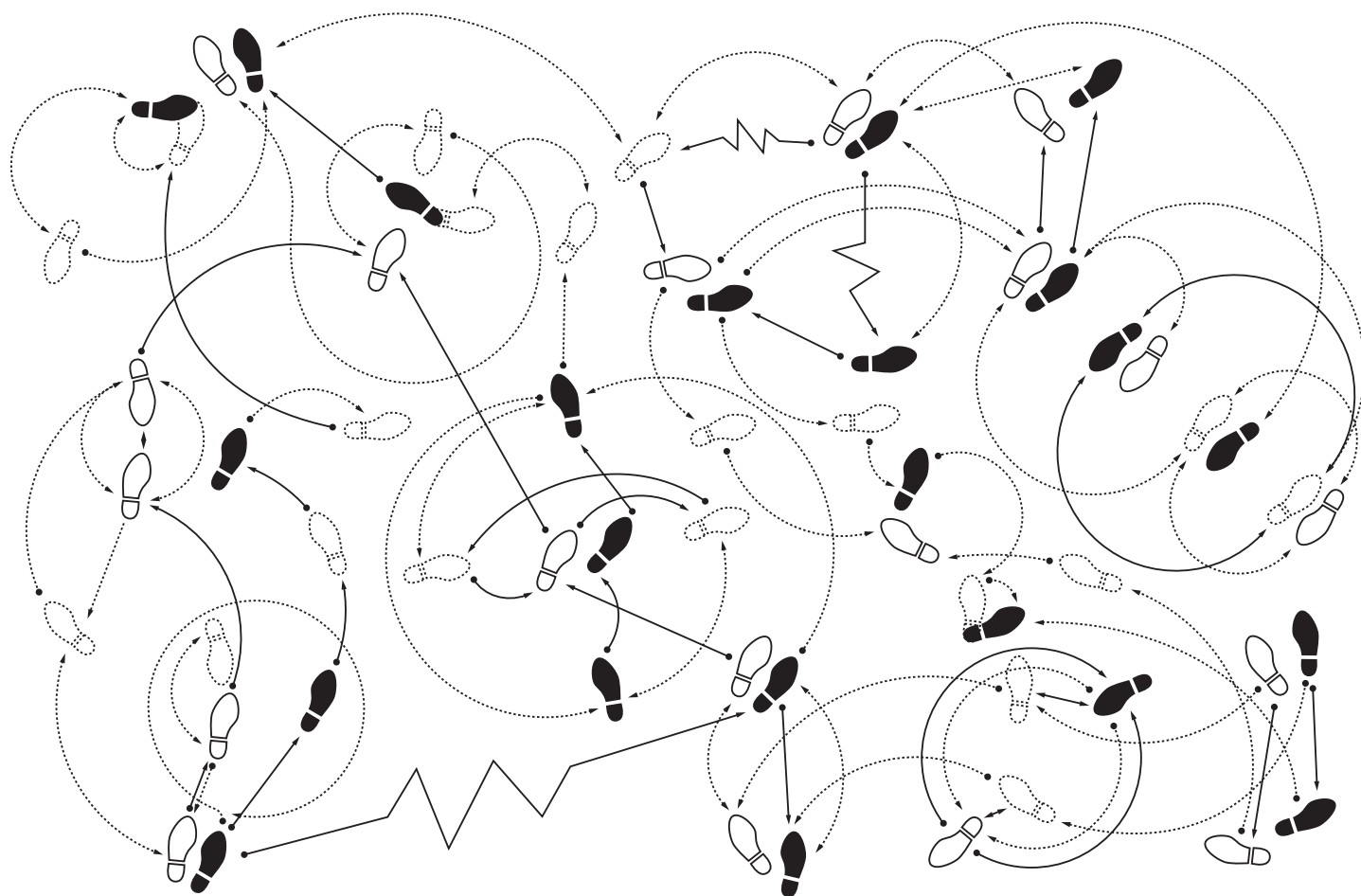
# RIPE AND READY FOR RIO+20?

108

THE UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Marikki Stocchetti

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## THE UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPEMENT AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

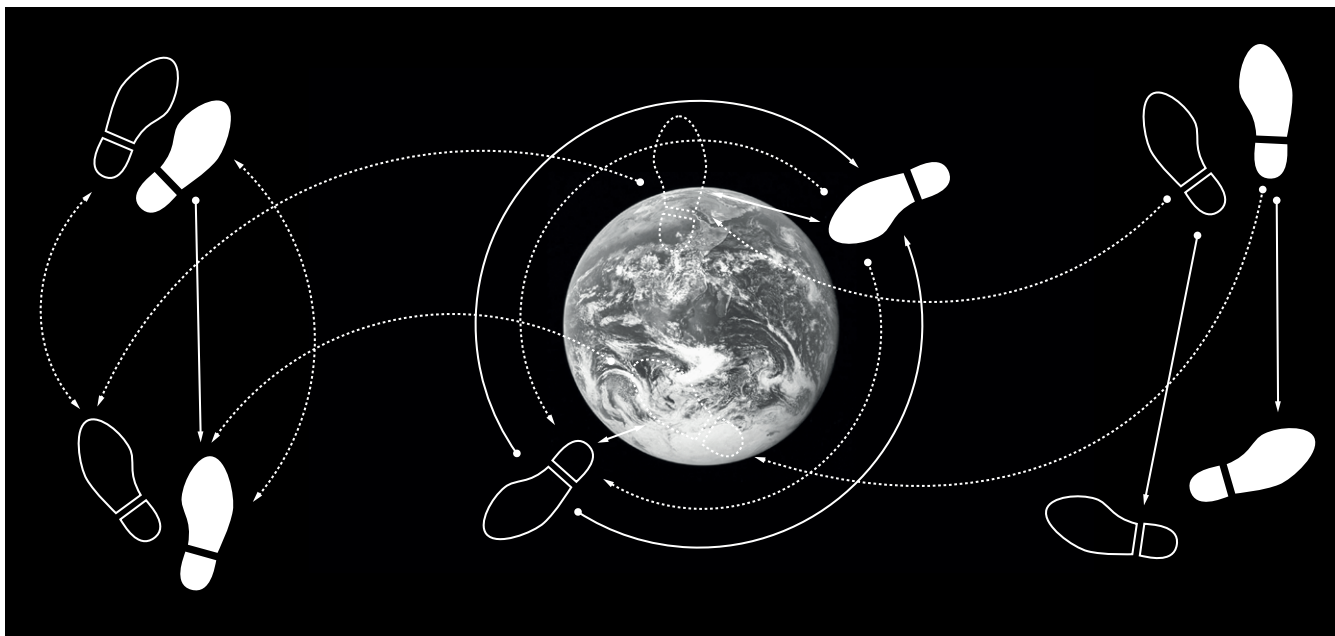


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- The UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) marks a historic opportunity to address unsustainable trends in economic, social and environmental development multilaterally. Still, on the eve of Rio+20, the international community lacks consensus and leadership.
- The European Union has taken a very proactive and constructive role in the preparations for Rio+20. However, the EU's commitment to the sustainable development agenda is not shared equally across its policies or member states. This weakens the EU's strategic position in the negotiations.
- Disagreements between Rio+20 parties cut across all the main items on the agenda. In particular, the topic of the "Green Economy" brings old clashes between developing economies and post-industrialized countries back to the fore. The key question relates, on the one hand, to the right to determine development strategies, and on the other hand, to the division of responsibilities between countries.
- On a more optimistic note, the need for institutional reform and joint sustainable development objectives has been widely acknowledged. In addition, much progress can still be made in the 15 thematic areas of sustainable development. This may compensate for the lack of unanimity on grand paradigms.
- It is of utmost importance for a successful outcome that the Union works in unison, with clear negotiation mandates, and coordinates its views effectively throughout the process. Success at Rio+20 may also help to increase the EU's own coherence with regard to sustainable development in the future.

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### From unsustainability to solutions

Essentially, the international efforts to promote “sustainable development” stem from the necessity to redirect human action towards more ecological and equitable paths. For the past forty years, the series of UN summits has provided an important forum for this purpose. Most notably, the UN Conference on Environment and Development, known as the “Earth Summit”, in Rio de Janeiro (1992), marked a historic launch of processes towards sustainable development. Now, twenty years later, Rio de Janeiro will again be the stage for an international drama on the future of the Earth. The stakes are high at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Despite the broad international consensus and official commitments made in the name of sustainable development, development remains far from sustainable: growth and an increase in income are still connected to declining environmental indicators and growing inequality both globally and within countries. High poverty rates, alarming climate change, continued loss of biodiversity and overexploitation of natural resources all demonstrate the enormity of the task at hand.<sup>1</sup>

To bridge the gap between the needs and efforts, the international community will re-convene to reset the global agenda for sustainable development, as

<sup>1</sup> UNDP Human Development Report 2011.

well as to review the past commitments. This time, negotiations revolve around three ambitious areas that include:

1. The Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.
2. The upgrading of environmental institutions for better governance.
3. An agreement on future objectives for sustainable development.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the conference will address 15 thematic issues such as food security, water and energy to direct future policies in these cross-cutting fields.<sup>3</sup> Taken together, these provisions (and framework for action) will form the Rio outcome document ambitiously entitled “The Future We Want”.

However, reaching a consensus on “the Wanted Future” and agreeing on the means of getting there has become ever more challenging. Compared to

<sup>2</sup> See the UN zero draft on the negotiations outcome accessible at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=12&nr=324&menu=20>

<sup>3</sup> In addition, the full list of issues includes cities, green jobs and social inclusion, oceans and seas including small island developing states (SIDS), natural disasters, climate change, forests and biodiversity, land degradation and desertification, mountains, chemicals and waste, sustainable consumption and production, education and gender equality.

#### The main UN events include:

- UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm 1972
- UN Stockholm + 10, Nairobi 1982
- UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro 1992 (Earth Summit)
- UN General Assembly General Session to Review Agenda21, New York 1997
- World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg 2002
- UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro 2012.

the forward-looking optimism that surrounded the first Rio Summit in the post-Cold War context, the current mood is characterized by a paradox. On the one hand, persistent poverty and inequality, food insecurity, climate and the financial crisis are essentially manifestations of unsustainable development and global governance that need to be tackled multilaterally. This, combined with an increase in scientific evidence, should as such suffice to trigger a new political commitment. But in reality, regaining a political commitment to the Rio process seems to constitute a fundamental challenge for the forthcoming Rio+20 agenda. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the outcome should engage an ever more heterogeneous group of actors. This group includes post-industrialized economies as well as emerging powers like China and other BRICSS, the diverse developing countries represented by the G77, international organizations, businesses and the civil society.<sup>4</sup> The main disagreements concern strategies to pursue development and growth as well as the division of responsibilities in tackling unsustainability.

In this regard, the role of the European Union at Rio+20 is intriguing indeed. On the one hand, the

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4 Industrialized countries are often referred to as “JUSCANZ” including Japan, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The BRICSS in turn consist of Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa. The Group of 77 with 132 member states is the largest intergovernmental organization of developing countries in the UN.

Union has adopted “sustainable development” as one of its core values in the Lisbon Treaty. In many respects, the Union and its member states have been remarkably more supportive of multilateral efforts when compared to, say, the US or the emerging economies. The EU has already adopted this kind of approach during the Rio+20 preparations, as it has played a proactive and constructive role in the “Future We Want” agenda-setting. In fact, it has a high stake in all of the main negotiation areas. Thus, the Union appears almost as an underdog in the situation. On the other hand, the commitment to sustainable development is not equally shared and integrated into the EU system, which weakens the Union position at the Rio Conference and beyond it. In sum, if the UN Conference on Sustainable Development is to succeed, the Union needs to be internally ripe and ready to play its hand well, and to know what it wants both inside and outside the EU.

The purpose of this paper is to look more closely at the EU’s role and the prospects for promoting sustainable development during the Rio+20 process. In particular, the focus is on the Union’s approach to the key issues on the current Rio+20 agenda: the Green Economy in the context of sustainable development, institutional reform and new goals and indicators. To take a few steps back, the paper first starts with a short reminder of the legacy of the first Earth Summit. Second, it proceeds to the three key issue areas that form the basis for the Rio+20 negotiations. Third, the preliminary EU priorities and challenges are analyzed against this backdrop. Finally, the paper concludes with a short summary of the Union’s prospects for promoting sustainable development at the Rio+20 Conference and beyond.

#### The legacy of the Earth Summit and the European Union

The difficulties of the Rio process and the breadth of the agenda stem from the complexity of the matter. Sustainable development as an approach was outlined first in the concluding report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) entitled *Our Common Future* (1987).<sup>5</sup> The

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5 The WCED report, also known as the Brundtland Report, provided a generic definition for sustainable development as development that meets the present needs without sacrificing future generations’ capacity to satisfy their needs.



The very first Earth Summit, held in Rio in 1992, saw the launch the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Photo: United Nations

purpose of the first Earth Summit in 1992 was to translate the idea of sustainable development into concrete action. Ideally, sustainable development implies two important changes in policy-making. First, it implies the ability to promote economic, social and environmental aspects of development simultaneously both at home and abroad. Second, it requires careful balancing between short-term interests and long-term values and principles. Consequently, this would require a new way of integrating politics into national and international negotiations.

In this regard, the legacy of the first Rio Conference on Environment and Development resulted in the first historic programme for promoting sustainable development. The programme consisted of three types of elements: international agreements, principles for global governance and agendas for action. Regarding international agreements, two binding environmental regimes were put on the table. These were the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that have led processes and institutions of their own since Rio. In turn, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development set out the key principles of sustainable development, such as common and differentiated responsibilities and equity principles for developed and developing countries alike. Equally important was the adoption of the “precautionary” and

“polluter pays” principles of good environmental governance.<sup>6</sup> Notably for social development, the Rio Declaration stresses the right to, and need for, development, growth and poverty eradication in the poorer countries. In addition, the Forest Principles defined sustainable management, conservation and development of all of the world’s forests. And lastly, regarding practices for sustainable development, Agenda 21 was adopted, which presented forty chapters of action plans engaging actors from local communities to the highest echelons of world politics and business. One of the key purposes of Agenda 21 was to get the different actors to incorporate the spirit of Rio into their own development strategies.

Relatedly, sustainable development has appeared as a guiding strategy with a legal basis for all EU policymakers since the signing of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1992. To a varying degree, it has since been present in internal and external policies. These include the EU’s relations with developing countries as well as its contributions to global governance. More precisely, the Treaty of Amsterdam (Article 6) states that the promotion of sustainable development must be integrated into the definition and implementation of all EU policies. Internationally, the EU (EC+ member states) has claimed a key role since the first Rio “Earth Summit”, and a more

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6 The precautionary principle implies that a lack of scientific certainty is no reason to postpone action to avoid potentially serious or irreversible harm to the environment.



systematic, Union-wide process was launched as a part of the preparations for Rio+10, the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002.<sup>7</sup>

However, the multidimensional sustainable development agenda poses a persistent problem for the Union as it does not fall neatly into the compartmentalized structure of EU policy-making. Often, sustainable development issues risk being overridden by other immediate sectoral interests or disagreements on what sustainable development implies. On a more positive front, the Union in itself already has in place a unique form of governance – comprising subnational, national to local levels that could be utilized more effectively for sustainable development. In the international negotiations on sustainable development, the EU's leadership has been largely based on the relatively strong EU environmental policy. Yet, the environmental dimension constitutes just one dimension of sustainable development.

Ten years ago, at the previous World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the EU was particularly successful in safe water and sanitation issues. It also pushed forward time-bound targets to reduce loss of biodiversity, affordable and clean energy and climate change. Although the efforts did not result in an international breakthrough due to reluctance from other parties (mainly the USA, Australia, OPEC and strong developing states), the EU still demonstrated a true commitment in these fields. On a further positive note, the EU's active campaigning for increasing development assistance at the UN Financing for Development of Monterrey earlier that year elevated the EU's profile in the promotion of sustainable development. On a gloomier note, the EU (DG trade) opposition to legally binding corporate rules watered down the provision of social and environmental aspects of trade and sustainable development. In a larger perspective, the history of the common agriculture and fisheries policies has a record that is in sharp contrast to the very idea of sustainable development and poverty eradication,

and which overshadows the overall EU profile also in the international negotiations. Furthermore, the provision on environmentally harmful subsidies is a sore point with some of the member states. In addition, the EU's proactive bilateral trade liberalization policy with its strong regulatory approach has often been seen as challenging for national sovereignty in developing countries negotiating with the Union.

The heterogeneity of the EU contribution in previous negotiations was caused by the lack of common vision and coordination by the EU negotiators. Earlier, the power to negotiate was defined by the Treaty-based competencies. Consequently, the Commission negotiated on all areas of exclusive competence (mainly trade and agriculture), whilst the Council Presidency (also Denmark at that time) expressed the common position on areas of mixed competence. However, in development and environment policies the respective Commissioners took a stronger, yet sometimes competing rather than complementary role. In Johannesburg, the EU was granted a "full participant status". With the advent of the Lisbon Treaty, the Union now has an even stronger role. The question is how the EU actors will seize this opportunity. One way to address this question is to look at the EU's stance towards the key negotiation areas of the Rio+20 Summit.

#### **'The Future We Want':**

##### **The spearheads of the Rio+20 agenda**

As always, the official summit dates are only the tip of the iceberg when compared to the months, sometimes even years, of active preparation. This time around, the initiative for the Rio+20 Conference was put on the table by the G77 in December 2009. Three years later, the UN published the so-called zero draft version of the proposed outcome document entitled "The Future We Want". The proposal consisted of 280 pages crystallizing over 6000 pages of submissions from national governments, international organizations, civil society networks and individuals. Since March, informal sessions have been arranged to build a consensus around the major themes. A long and winding road lies ahead as 401 of the 422 paragraphs of the outcome document remain to be settled just weeks before the summit. This time the devil seems to be in the detailed targets as much as in the larger frameworks. Furthermore, discussions are marked by disagreements both

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7 The basis for the EU Rio+10 position was defined in the EU sustainable development strategies of 2001 and 2002 with a global dimension. The latter was updated in 2005. Documents are accessible at [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/environment/sustainable\\_development/l28117\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/environment/sustainable_development/l28117_en.htm)

inside the country groups as well as between them. This paper proceeds by looking at each of the main negotiation items firstly in general and then from the EU perspective(s).

### ***The Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication***

Unsurprisingly, the core question of economy and growth features at the top of the “Future We Want” agenda. After forty years of debate on sustainability and economic growth, the equation remains to be solved. At Rio+20, the debate will continue under the “green economy and green growth” heading. According to the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), a green economy is one that “results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”. This goal poses a real litmus test for the international community as its realization would require a major overhaul in the ways in which economy and growth are contemplated and governed both in the industrialized economies as well as in the developing world. In more concrete terms, this implies major changes in production and consumption habits across the globe, as well as a rethink where production networks, international trade, intellectual property and investment are concerned. Ideally, the resulting new breed of growth would contribute to poverty eradication (while maintaining levels of competitiveness) with less intensive energy and resource use and less pollution (especially low carbon) than has traditionally been the case.

With such a demand, this provision with its various negotiation items is likely to become one of the main bones of contention during the actual negotiations. The key question is how the international community can reach a consensus on the overall goal, as well as a politically acceptable process to implement it in different country contexts. This is a particularly sensitive issue for the G77 group, which prioritizes poverty reduction over environmental concerns. Both the major emerging powers as well as many of the African developing states view “the Green Economy” as a manifestation of Western dominance based on specific technology and know-how that adds on more costs for poorer countries while narrowing the scale of their development and growth strategies. Also, in times of sluggish economic growth in the US and the sovereign debt crisis in Europe, the willingness of advanced economies to

lead the way – to change their own economies and share technologies and know-how, for instance – is increasingly being questioned.

### ***New institutional structure for better governance***

The first Rio Conference recognized that the promotion of sustainable development requires adequate institutional arrangements at the local, national, regional and international levels. Regarding the international level, there has been a widely shared concern that environmental governance suffers from fragmented and weak institutions, which results in weaker implementation and monitoring of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Now with more than 500 such agreements in place, this gap needs to be addressed. As regards the 40-year-old United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) as well as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), there is a proposal to turn them into stronger UN bodies that would bridge the gap between environmental governance and economic governance. This is particularly important for ensuring greater coherence between the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development and improving coordination with the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as other UN agencies. In practice, this would require enlargement of the UNEP governing council membership from the current 58 countries to a more universal constellation, or the creation of a new environmental organization (UNEO) based on the UNEP.

Perhaps a more controversial issue concerns the future of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which functions under the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. However, in its current form, it is largely perceived within the UN that the mere renewal of the CSD mandate is not enough and it should be transformed into a Sustainable Development Council. The role of such a body would be essential as it would serve as an authoritative, high-level body for all matters relating to any of the three aspects of sustainable development, as well as the whole follow-up to Rio+20. Essentially, the Council would have similar powers to the UN Human Rights Council. This would also include a peer review mechanism. However, also in this respect, the disagreements within the groups have slowed down the negotiations for each of the proposed alternatives. In this situation, Mexico has provided an opening for the creation of a specific

forum for sustainable development that would offer a compromise solution to the deadlock and provide more time for the institutional reform.

### ***New goals for sustainable development***

To galvanize the Rio+20 agenda into action, there is a need for jointly agreed goals, targets and milestones that would commit all stakeholders and shift the focus beyond the traditional GDP. Regarding the former, the challenge is at least twofold. First, to have goals that would encompass the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development in a balanced way. Second, to have objectives that would engage not only developing countries but also industrialized economies to push their sustainable development strategies forward. The proposal for such a process is related to the future of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) whose primary purpose is to bring about the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Whereas the MDGs were formulated to direct developing countries, the new goals would concern each country regardless of the level of development. In this regard, the “Future We Want” agenda already includes a proposal to establish a set of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as a mechanism for periodic follow-up and reporting. Logically, the core set of SDGs is largely based on the 15 key themes on the negotiating table.<sup>8</sup> However, at this stage it remains to be seen if the outcome will also include a decision on the process and exact themes as supported, for instance, by Switzerland, New Zealand, Mexico, Norway, Australia and certain EU member states, or just a decision to create SDGs in the future.

The purpose of the SDGs is to complement and strengthen the Millennium Development Goals up to the 2015 deadline. However, in the light of the progress reviews so far, it is highly unlikely that these targets will be met within the next few years, especially by the least developed fragile countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, what remains to be solved is the role of the poverty-oriented agenda in the wider context of sustainable development. To

this end, a proper balancing between human – and especially gender-oriented MDGs – and a more environmentally inclined SDG agenda will become crucial. Equally important is the need to ensure that the economic aspects, including (green) growth strategies as well as the wider (green) economy, are adequately addressed. However, much confusion reigns over the relationship between the Green Economy as a universal approach, the thematic issues and the proposed goals. To the disappointment of many, the US administration under President Obama has taken a very cautious stand in this regard and has shown very little interest in making any universal commitments that the US itself should also adhere to. In addition, the uncertainty with regard to whether Obama himself will actually attend the negotiations raises questions around the US role in Rio+20 in general.

### **The EU as the underdog of Rio**

As regards the main themes of the Future We Want agenda, the EU has in general sought a high profile with respect to all the key areas. In so doing, it has acted as a driving force for the agenda-setting amongst the negotiation parties. For the Union, these items are closely interconnected as the Green Economy is the overall context to facilitate the achievement of the SDGs, while improved governance is needed for both purposes. In addition, the EU has keen interests in many of the sectoral themes, particularly in the five core themes of water, oceans, energy, land use, ecosystems and resource efficiency. EU visibility at Rio is guaranteed with a high-level delegation comprising the respective leaders of the EU institutions, which also illustrates the political importance of the Conference to the Union.

In the internal preparations, the European Commission has made a concerted effort to produce a coordinated position (including public consultations.) The Commission initiated the official preparatory process, drawing on the EU Europe 2020 strategy in June 2011 with a Communication entitled *Rio+20: Towards the Green Economy and Better Governance*. As for the Council, priorities were adopted at the Environmental Council in March 2012. Whereas ten years ago development ministers led the process in the working groups, the Rio+20 preparations have clearly been environment-led both in the Council and in the member states. The challenge for the EU

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8 The proposed SDGs are slated to include sustainable consumption and production patterns as well as priority areas such as oceans, food security and sustainable agriculture, sustainable energy for all, water access and efficiency, sustainable cities, green jobs, decent work and social inclusion, and disaster risk reduction and resilience.



Wind turbine near Palanga, Lithuania.  
Photo: Andrius Baranauskas



lies in the breadth of the sustainable development agenda, which makes it very difficult to control and coordinate the member states' interests, as well as sectoral policy interests. In the absence of a solid common view on many of the details, instead of just adjusting its positions in the negotiations with the others, the EU has to negotiate its own contributions in parallel. This again puts a lot of pressure on Denmark, which is holding the Council presidency.

***The EU take on the Green Economy:  
Views from the Commission and the Council***

As the Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication forms the backbone of the EU's approach in the negotiations, it merits a closer look. Both the Commission and the Council see it as crucial to conclude a concrete strategy for the Green Economy globally. However, their stances also differ from one another. In a nutshell, the Commission position is an interesting mix of market-led solutions (e.g. emission trading, taxes, tradable permits, payments for an ecosystem services scheme), a well-acknowledged context of environmental degradation and persistent global poverty. However, environmental and social challenges are transferred via innovations and investment into economic possibilities in *all* countries. Consequently, the Commission priorities revolve around well-managed economic growth, and the sustainable management of natural resources combined with the creation of the "right market conditions", including a strong regulatory framework. In this respect, the Commission places much emphasis

on greater private sector involvement and entrepreneurship, placing less weight on democracy and the participation of citizens at the national and local levels. To advance sustainable development internationally, the Commission proposes "partnerships" in the crucial sectors of water, energy, oceans, forests, sanitation and agriculture. Agriculture is a particularly interesting case as the Commission is vocal when it comes to food security and good governance, both globally and locally. In the Commission vision, the key is the sustainable use of land and investment in agriculture. However, the Commission's view lacks any reflections on the EU's own agricultural policy or trade in agriculture without which the vision risks remaining incomplete.

The EU's first general position at Rio+20 was initially discussed at the October 2011 Council meeting. Similarly to the Commission's initial view, it emphasizes the importance of the Green Economy and the package of reforms for environmental governance. However, the Council places democracy, human rights, citizens' participation, the rule of law, education, youth and gender at the core of sustainable development much more emphatically than the Commission. While highlighting the importance of the private sector and public-private partnerships in promoting investment, trade and innovation for the Green Economy, the Council also reaffirms the need to implement worldwide sound corporate governance as well as international principles and standards on corporate responsibility. Thus, both parties stress the importance of governance for sustainable

development but with different emphases on the market and citizens. Overall, the success of the Green Economy framework depends on its actual content and tangible targets. In this respect, the EU has found cautious support from the US side, but the G77 still needs convincing of their commitments.

As the time to lock into the official positions approaches, national characteristics become more apparent on the EU front. As regards the Green Economy, the EU has problems formulating a common stand on harmful subsidies and fisheries due to the vested interests of some of the member states, which sends out a discouraging signal. Moreover, the economic and euro crisis may also explain the reluctance to make further commitments. Alarmingly for the rights-based approach advocated by the Council, the more conservative new member states (Malta, Poland, Hungary) aim to water down the Union's stance towards sexual and reproductive health and rights. The question of water and sanitation has also caused a degree of internal confusion as the UK has difficulties in accepting the human rights-based EU stance towards these provisions.

#### ***Almost a common EU ground: Institutional reform and SDGs***

Regarding the issue of stronger environmental governance, the Union strongly supports the plan to reinforce the UNEP in order to upgrade it to an Environmental Organization (UNEO). In this respect, the Commission has prioritized the option to transfer and upgrade the UNEP, even if this were to entail the adoption of a legally binding treaty. However, the Commission also regards it as important to improve the sustainable development capacity within the UN structure via ECOSOC, as well as changing the role of the Council for Sustainable Development. Regarding the exact mandates of these proposed institutions, both the Commission and the Council are as yet divided.

Common EU ground can also be found in the aim of negotiating clear guidelines for implementing the Rio+20 outcomes. Thus, both institutions highlight the importance of "roadmaps" for basically every key area under negotiation with time-bound objectives and actions to be simultaneously achieved at the international, regional and national levels. This kind of target-oriented approach appears to be of importance to the Union at Rio+20. However, almost from the outset, "the roadmap approach" aroused

opposition, especially among the G77 group. On the other hand, the Council stresses the importance of the UN Millennium Goals review process and efforts to achieve these goals. Thus, supporting the idea of universal sustainable development goals post-2015 would not compromise the commitments already made to the MDGs. This stance, together with a continued commitment to development financing, is important particularly for the African G77 countries. In addition, the negotiations on the substance of the 15 thematic areas provide the Union with slots in which it can effectively promote its sustainable development agenda in a pragmatic way and demonstrate a true commitment.

#### **Prospects for Rio+20 and beyond**

The challenge of Rio+20 lies in the enormity of the task at hand, which is not commensurate with the progress and political commitments so far. It also reflects the difficulties in the other multilateral fora, such as the WTO, UNCTAD or the Climate talks. Although all indicators suggest that it is the eleventh hour to act, none of the parties is eager to show the way. Despite its internal struggles and incoherence, the EU still stands out in this respect. Taken together, the initial EU position towards Rio+20 enhances the multilateral process for sustainable development significantly. The EU's willingness to reach not only a political agreement, but a clear, multilevel strategy is essential for any successful outcome of Rio+20. In this respect, the EU is ripe and ready enough to enter the negotiations, but leadership would be too much to claim. Although much of the potential success depends on the Union, it also requires a consensus with the other actors, most notably the other industrialized countries, BRICSS and the G77. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the EU is poised to take a more proactive and coherent stance across the board also at the formal negotiation tables. Similarly, it is crucial for the Union to work in unison with clear negotiation mandates, and to coordinate efforts effectively throughout the process and provisions.

As regards the EU's priorities, it appears likely that the Union's roadmap approach to the Green Economy will face most opposition from the major emerging powers and the G77. On the other hand, the EU's take on the social dimensions, especially on the Millennium Development Goals and future

Sustainable Development Goals, seems more attractive for a wider group of parties, in particular for the African G77 states. Although the SDGs call for a process of their own, this kind of initial stand may prove to be fruitful in the discussions after Rio+20. However, the immediate success for the Union at Rio+20 may reside more in the details and targets of the 15 thematic areas than in the grand plans for the economy and social development.

From a wider perspective, the Rio+20 process is a two-way street. It is not only the European Union that is important for the UN Conference, the Rio process is of crucial importance for the EU. The Union needs external pressure, especially peer pressure, to realize its commitments to sustainable development both in its internal as well as its external action. Thus, a strong Rio+20 outcome may also help to increase the EU's own policy coherence for sustainable development. In this respect, limited success in the negotiations is not enough. As the international governance lacks an institution that would safeguard the legacy of the Rio process, as well as monitor and review all three aspects of sustainable development, the EU should address the proposal for the UN Council for Sustainable Development or a forum of a similar nature with an open mind.

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