

**DEPUTY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT, PHYSICAL PLANNING
AND PUBLIC WORKS**

**Representing the Hellenic Socialist Party in the Meeting of the
PARTY OF EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS**

PES Working Party on Sustainable Development

General Comments on the Document

Athens, 25.02.2002

Dear Colleagues,

We have studied thoroughly and with great interest the Revised Text on Sustainable Development. We consider it to be a well-balanced and forward-looking document, which expresses in a satisfactory way our common vision for sustainable development. Particularly we would like to underline that part of the Document, which refers to the Global responsibility and entails a message to Johannesburg. The relevant paragraphs are ambitiously drafted and are certainly among the most interesting in the Document.

We believe that sustainability is fundamentally a question of values, perceptions and individual behaviour which can develop the functional synergies between the three components of sustainable development: economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection. Hence, it is important that *sustainable development should also be perceived in terms of culture – one imbued with the values of sustainability.*

Therefore, our approach to sustainability cannot be reduced to an exercise in defining, monitoring and pursuing technical goals. Though monitoring and reporting are important tools, sustainable development as a “value-oriented vision”, should be clearly guided by some central notions, able to motivate the citizens of Europe and of the whole world. Such a notion can be “*environmental democracy*” and “*μετρον*”, (“*the principle of measured action*”), a concept having its origins in classical thought. In the same context, “solidarity between generations and solidarity between

countries”, “local action and participation”, as referred to in the PES Working Document, correspond to what can be described and perceived as “*Environmental solidarity*”.

The Concept of Environmental Solidarity. The EU sustainable development policy must encompass countries at different levels of development. The ecological problems of climate change (CO₂ emissions) and biodiversity loss are both connected to stages of development. It is a historical fact that the more industrially advanced countries exhibit, as a result of pursuing minimum-cost strategies, higher *levels* of emissions and a greater loss in biodiversity. Countries at lower levels of industrial capacity henceforth follow development paths that involve greater regard for environmental implications, and hence entail a greater financial cost. Moreover, targets specified in terms of rates of change are likely to be harder to meet, if the starting levels are lower. *There is a danger that the pursuit of a more sustainable development path may be interpreted as carrying a cost in terms of growth and prosperity.* Moreover, the burden of pursuing an *overall* sustainable development could be seen to be unevenly distributed between member states.

The concept of Environmental Solidarity is, thus, a way of correcting the erroneous idea that there exists a trade-off between sustainability and prosperity, by introducing the principle of compensating, so as to facilitate a new equilibrium, with equivalent levels of prosperity but higher levels of biodiversity.

As regards the point of **taxation as an instrument**, it is true that **economic instruments** are very useful as a complement to fighting pollution, but they cannot be the “fundamentally” important instruments.

Using taxation as a means of combating pollution is not without problems for the following reasons:

1. This usually implies the heavier taxation of goods like energy, which are used by broad population strata, and it is going to have an important effect on their budget. In other words, the PES should not neglect the distributional impact of such a taxation. To argue that the higher taxation on consumption could help in reducing other taxes to promote employment is still a theoretical possibility without any concrete empirical content.

2. Besides the households, the competitiveness aspect for many enterprises may be very important, if it is not well co-ordinated at European and even world level. Moreover, a tax like a kilometer tax, could make the products of the relatively poor regions more costly to the consumers of the northern countries and vice versa.
3. Tax harmonization in the energy sector is difficult before a unified single energy market is established in the European Union.

We turn now to **the role of Agriculture**. European agriculture faces today new challenges such as enlargement, the WTO round, as well as concerns of European citizens related to quality of life, social and economic cohesion, the future of our rural world. There is no doubt that we need an internationally competitive farming sector. However, it has never been proved that world market forces alone can provide the required European standards concerning food safety, food quality, protection of the environment.

Why we need a CAP becomes more evident if one looks at the potential impact for EU agriculture from the *absence* of such a policy. The risk would be the development of a mostly dual production system. The core of our farming system, a family-based agriculture, could thus be squeezed. Agriculture in the less favoured areas may be abandoned altogether and desertification would follow. The result could be less diversity in forms of agriculture, countryside and of rural communities. Such a development does not reflect the aspirations of our society.

It is also vital for Europe to safeguard and revitalize the social fabric in our rural and farming areas. We need therefore to employ the necessary means in order to promote and defend a Common Agriculture and Rural Policy up to our ambitions.

Finally, another crucial point -from an environmental point of view- is the question of **nuclear energy**. The Document on Sustainable Development underlines the need to shift from the fossil fuel consumption to the wide use of renewable energy sources. Equally important is to develop an energy and technology strategy that will deliver under *market* conditions the long term security of supply to European citizens balancing *both* environmental *and* security objectives. We think that the respective paragraphs should be supplemented by a reference to the need to formulate an energy

policy taking all due account to both the environmental and the security externalities of energy sources, including nuclear energy.

We hope that these thoughts will contribute to our dialogue on the crucial issue of sustainable development and we wish every success for our coming meeting,

With best regards,

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