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Sustainable development governance & policies in the light of major EU policy strategies and international developments

by

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This Quarterly Report (QR) provides an overview and analysis of sustainable development (SD) governance and policies at the EU and Member States level. Currently, the framework for SD governance and policy in the European Union is in a state of change. On the one hand, the EU SDS of 2006 requires the European Council in 2011 to decide “when a comprehensive review of the EU SDS needs to be launched” (para 45); a decision on the review will also influence the future of the EU SDS. On the other hand, SD issues and targets are increasingly included in other important EU policy strategies, most notably in the Europe 2020 strategy as well as the flagship initiative, “A resource-efficient Europe” (2011), and its Roadmap that was published on 20 September 2011. Additionally, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) will focus as one of its major themes on the institutional framework for SD and issues of SD governance, including SD strategy processes at the national level. All these recent developments call for a reflection on how SD governance and policies can be best addressed in current EU policy strategies and in preparation to the Rio+20 conference.

Chapter one of this QR provides a general introduction about the link between SD and governance. Chapter two focuses on the EU SDS and the Europe 2020 Strategy (incl. the resource-efficient Europe Flagship Initiative and Roadmap); it presents how SD is included in these major policy strategies and provides a table on similarities and differences of the governance processes of both strategies. In chapter three, an overview is given on one of the two major themes of the Rio+20 conference, “institutional framework for SD” and which specific recommendations have been developed as of yet for SD governance in general. Chapter four takes stock of experiences on the national level with SD governance and policies: on the one hand, experiences with NSDS implementation are provided; on the other hand, we give an overview of the new National Reform Program (NRPs) of the EU Member States that have been published in April 2011. Some conclusions are drawn in the final chapter five.

This QR is one of the background documents for the [7th ESDN Workshop](#) (Berlin, 27-28 October 2011).

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1 Sustainable development and governance

This section of the QR provides an overview of the linkages between sustainable development and governance. Although discussions about both concepts seem impossibly broad, it is necessary to reflect on their relationship and to examine the means through which different political levels (international, European, national, sub-national) and various stakeholders reconcile economic, ecological and social goals. Moreover, deliberations about the two concepts need to reflect upon the decisions made by and the interactions between economic, social and political agents and actors across multiple levels and scale (Baker, 2009).

1.1 General aspects in the relation between SD and governance

The objective of **sustainable development** – namely, achieving simultaneously economic well-being, environmental protection and social equity – poses significant challenges for government institutions on all political-administrative levels, which were originally established on the basis of more sectoral concerns. The challenges associated with sustainable development are interdependent and integrated and thus require “comprehensive approaches and popular participation” (WCED, 1987, 9). In order to address these challenges, sustainable development strategies have been developed on the international and national level since the mid-1990s, but mostly in preparation for the 2002 UN World Summit in Johannesburg. They aim to outline a fully integrated process of strategic decision-making for sustainable development, including objectives and governing mechanisms (Meadowcroft, 2007a). An overview of experiences with national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs) in Europe can be found in Chapter 4 of this QR. The renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) of 2006, as the EU’s main policy document for strategic and integrated decision-making, contains principles for governance that reflect governance processes and that aim to more effectively steer the processes of sustainable development policy-making in Europe: open and democratic society; involvement of citizens; involvement of businesses and social partners; policy coherence and governance; policy integration; make polluters pay (European Council, 2006).

The link between governance and sustainable development is thus fundamental and has already been addressed in the Brundtland Report of 1987 (WCED, 1987). Generally, **governance** refers to the *managing, steering and guiding of public affairs by governing procedures and institutions in a democratic manner, especially in relation to public policy decision-making* (Baker, 2009; Jordan, 2008; Lafferty, 2004). ‘Good governance’ is a specifically normative usage that prescribes certain steering procedures and institutions – based on principles, values and norms, i.e. participation, transparency, rule of law, etc. – that should be adopted to achieve preferred outcomes. The origin of good governance is associated with international organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD that developed the concept in the context of development policy. The EU has addressed good governance in its White Paper on European Governance (European Commission, 2001), defining five principles for application and designating the concept a normative standard for the Community’s policy processes.

Governance mechanisms are crucial for achieving sustainable development. **‘Governance for sustainable development’** can be defined as “processes of socio-political governance oriented towards the attainment of sustainable development. It encompasses public debate, political decision-making, policy formation and implementation, and complex interactions among public authorities, private business and civil society – *in so far as these relate to steering societal development along more sustainable lines*” (Meadowcroft, 2007b, 299). In turn, sustainable development can be understood as a reform agenda not only for sectoral policies, but also for cross-sectoral governance structures and processes (Lafferty, 2004, 2002; OECD, 2002). The first document to frame **sustainable development as a governance reform agenda** was Agenda 21, the action plan adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio 1992 (UNCED, 1992). The governance aspects of the action plan were reiterated and complemented at the UN World Summit in Johannesburg 2002 (Rio +10). The World Summit Report pointed out that “good governance is essential for sustainable development” (UN, 2002). This report also puts forward several objectives for reforming governing institutions for sustainable development, such as the integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of policy-making in a balanced manner; strengthening coherence, coordination and monitoring; enhancing participation and effective involvement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders; and strengthening educational, scientific and informational initiatives for sustainable development at all political levels. The forthcoming Rio+20 conference will again address governance issues in one of the two top themes, [‘Institutional Framework for SD’](#). Chapter 3 of this QR will provide an overview of the preparatory work of UNCSD in this context.

1.2 Governance for sustainable development – steering requirements and challenges

Governance for sustainable development involves some important steering requirements and challenges that we shortly describe below. They refer to a steering logic that is specific for the aim to achieve sustainable development (this section is largely based on Baker, 2009 and Berger, 2009):

(a) Steering in the context of uncertainty and ambivalent steering objectives:

Promoting sustainable development is not a blueprint nor is it about helping society reach an identified or identifiable end state. Rather, it is an open-ended and on-going process whose desirable characteristics change over time, across space and location, and within different social, political, cultural and historical contexts. Thus, promotion efforts are undertaken in the context of open-ended goals and on-going change, in short, within the context of inherent policy ambivalence. The promotion of sustainable development also has to take place amidst the complex and dynamic interactions between society, economic development, technology and nature. As Baker (2009, 5) put it: “In short, governance has to cope with the complexity and the indeterminacy of sustainable development as a steering objective. This can present problems because traditionally policy-making starts from the basis that effective steering requires clear goals.”

(b) Steering for the long-term

The sustainable development concept includes a very strong inter-generational element. However, long-term decision-making presents particular governance problems, as it adds to uncertainties. The further into the future we project, the weaker our knowledge base becomes. This means that steering for the long-term requires institutional flexibility to enable institutions to both anticipate and handle unforeseen problems or opportunities. However, it is not easy to include long-term thinking into current modes of policy- and decision-making, which are usually characterised by short-term orientation. Baker (2009, 6) argues that “governments have often only limited incentives to learn (...) new skills [for long-term policy-making], as future problems are not popular with politicians, have limited issue salience and do not bring new votes at elections.”

(c) Steering through multiple levels (vertical integration)

Due to the fact that policy-making for sustainable development involves the responsibilities of different tiers of government, coordination among these tiers is crucial for achieving sustainable development. In other words, governance for sustainable development requires steering activity that cuts across functional and administrative boundaries and established territorial jurisdictions. Increasingly, these complex multi-level governance structures and processes encounter economic actors and civil society organisations, such as environmental NGOs, that also operate across multiple levels. Tensions and struggles within and between the authorities and actors operating at these different levels are typical of modern political processes. This presents challenges not only for policy co-ordination and for the delineation of responsibilities, but also for ensuring transparency, accountability and the monitoring of compliance. Therefore, promoting sustainable development requires overcoming failures of co-ordination in public policies (Baker, 2009).

(d) Steering across multiple sectors (horizontal integration)

The concept of sustainable development fundamentally addresses the integration of various policy sectors and the coordination of different policy arenas (Jordan, 2008; Pezzoli, 1997; Sneddon et al, 2006). In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental policy was conceived and implemented as a ‘stand alone’ policy area, largely independent of policies in other sectors. However, by the 1990s, the limitations of specialisation and differentiation were increasingly evident, resulting in new awareness of the need to take environmental considerations into account within a wide range of sectoral policies. Thus, the need to co-ordinate policies and governance practices began to be keenly felt. When policy moves from concerns about environmental management to the adoption of the more encompassing sustainable development policy framework, the need for sectoral integration becomes even more pressing. The effectiveness of steering efforts to promote sustainable development is to a large measure based on the extent to which policy approaches are cross-cutting and take account of sectoral linkages. Most importantly, sustainable development calls for horizontal policy integration that balances economic, social and environmental interests and policies in a way that trade-offs (or negative effects) between them are minimised and

synergies (or win-win-win opportunities) are maximised (Berger & Steurer, 2009; Steurer, 2008).

The governance challenge is that governments should make their economic, social and environmental policies more coherent and establish institutional mechanisms that foster coordination between sectoral ministries and their related administrations. In practice, however, the challenges of integrating and coordinating different policy sectors seems to increase in the context of complex decision structures and established political-administrative cultures, e.g. government departments responsible for sectoral policies ('departmentalisation'), thinking within 'sectoral silos' (Berger & Steurer, 2009). Moreover, the link between economic and environmental issues is most often addressed in the context of sustainable development (e.g. environmental management, green technologies, etc); social issues are usually only marginally included in the mainstream sustainable development discourse (Berger, 2009).

(e) Steering together (participation)

It has become an acceptable dogma that participation, from both economic actors and from within civil society, is a necessary quality of sustainable development governance. Agenda 21, for instance, emphasises that “one of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation” (UNCED, 1992, para. 23.2). Participatory processes are institutional settings that bring together various actors at some stage in the policy-making process. In this context, participation is expected (a) to help define sustainable development objectives, (b) to facilitate reflexivity through the exchange of relevant knowledge and information, (c) to increase the societal ownership of sustainable development policies, and (d) to foster horizontal policy integration through reconciling different stakeholder interests (Steurer, 2008). Due to the comprehensive challenge faced by sustainable development in addressing societal challenges and linking different sectoral policy issues, it seems particularly important to involve the stakeholders' knowledge, expertise and capacities to achieve sustainable development objectives. Nevertheless, practical experience shows that the collaboration among the different stakeholder groups with different institutional and sectoral background is often problematic and finding a common language and frameworks for exchange is difficult to achieve – similar to the 'departmentalisation' of policy-making in governments, see horizontal policy integration (Zwirner et al, 2008).

(f) Steering with tools and instruments

Recent practices of governance have made a range of new tools available for the promotion of sustainable development. Besides regulation or other 'command-and-control' instruments, other mechanisms such as market-based tools, voluntary agreements, and information and awareness raising are increasingly used. As Baker (2009) argues, on a pragmatic level, it is hoped that the use of new instruments will help to reduce the implementation deficit with respect to environmental policy, thereby helping to achieve more effective implementation of EU regulatory and sustainable development goals. Enhanced reliance upon markets can be seen in the growing use of voluntary agreements and in the development of 'codes of practice' within business and industry to address environmental concerns. The EU also relies on other 'soft' policy

tools, such as policy appraisal, including environmental and sustainability impact assessments and strategic environmental assessment, which are aimed at making policy more anticipatory, coherent and effective. As well as broadening the range of policy tools it uses, the EU has also sought to make its existing tools, in particular regulation, more amenable to its new approaches to governance. This includes introducing flexible regulatory instruments, such as framework legislation, as well as feed-in tariffs and emission trading. The EU also tries to steer with information and the so-called Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC has been characterised as a soft approach compared to hierarchical governance, and even as a form of network governance (Héritier, 2002). It takes practices from market governance, such as benchmarking, target setting and peer review, and uses them to fix guidelines and set timetables for achieving set goals within the member states.

Another important tool for steering and achieving sustainable development is the use of overarching policy strategies. The chapters below address the experiences with the EU SDS and NSDSs in more detail, and provide an overview on the new Europe 2020 Strategy processes. Due to the fact that sustainable development is included in several other policy strategies, notably in the Europe 2020 Strategy and its Flagship Initiatives, it is worthwhile to remember the ***key characteristics for a policy strategy to achieve sustainable development***, put forward by UNDESA in 2004:

- Integration and balancing of economic, social and environmental objectives;
- Multi-stakeholder participation, effective partnerships, transparency and accountability;
- Country ownership, shared vision, commitment and continuous improvements;
- Capacity-building, enabling environment, building on existing knowledge and processes;
- Focus on coherent means of implementation;
- Linkage with budget and investment processes; and
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation.

2 EU SDS and Europe 2020 Strategy

2.1 The renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS)

In June 2006, the European Council adopted an ambitious and comprehensive renewed [EU SDS for an enlarged EU](#)² as a result of an extensive review process that started in 2004. The renewed EU SDS is a **single** and **coherent strategy** on how the EU will more effectively live up to its long-standing commitment to meet the challenges of sustainable development. It recognises the need to gradually change our current unsustainable consumption and production patterns and to move towards a better-integrated approach to policy-making. It reaffirms the need for global solidarity and recognises the importance of strengthening our work with partners outside the EU, including those rapidly developing countries, which will have a significant impact on global sustainable development. The **overall aim** of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy is to identify and develop actions to enable the EU to achieve a **continuous long-term improvement of quality of life** through the creation of sustainable communities that are able to manage and use resources more efficiently, are able to tap the ecological and social innovation potential of the economy, and are able to ensure prosperity, environmental protection and social cohesion.

The EU SDS sets out overall objectives and concrete actions for **seven key priority challenges**, mostly for the period until 2010:

- 1) **Climate change and clean energy:** *to limit climate change and its costs and negative effects to society and the environment;*
- 2) **Sustainable transport:** *to ensure that our transport systems meet society's economic, social and environmental needs whilst minimising their undesirable impacts on the economy, society and the environment;*
- 3) **Sustainable consumption & production:** *to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns;*
- 4) **Conservation and management of natural resources:** *to improve management and avoid overexploitation of natural resources, recognising the value of ecosystem services;*
- 5) **Public Health:** *to promote good public health on equal conditions and improve protection against health threats;*
- 6) **Social inclusion, demography and migration:** *to create a socially inclusive society by taking into account solidarity between and within generations and to secure and increase the quality of life of citizens as a precondition for lasting individual well-being;*
- 7) **Global poverty and sustainable development challenges:** *to actively promote sustainable development worldwide and ensure that the European Union's internal and external policies are consistent with global sustainable development and its international commitments.*

² It was developed on the basis of the Gothenburg EU SDS of 2001.

Additionally, the renewed EU SDS includes **two cross-cutting policies** that aim to contribute to the knowledge society:

1. Education and training;
2. Research and development.

Although having a focus on environmental issues, **the renewed EU SDS tries to balance economic, social and environmental objectives more evenly**. However, the strategy does not clarify the relationship between economic growth³ and SD (see also [ESDN QR, December 2008](#)).

To improve synergies and reduce trade-offs, a more integrated approach to policy making is proposed in the EU SDS, based on better regulation ([impact assessments](#)) and on the [guiding principles for sustainable development](#) (adopted by the European Council of June 2005). The external dimension of sustainable development (e.g. global resource use, international development concerns) is factored into EU internal policy making and through integration of SD considerations in EU's external policies.

The EU SDS has been developed as a strategy for the whole EU. It, therefore, proposes **governance mechanisms** for improving the coordination with other levels of governments (vertical integration) and calls upon business, NGOs and citizens to become more involved in working for sustainable development (stakeholder participation). Education, research and public finance are stressed as important instruments in facilitating the transition to more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

Since monitoring and follow-up are crucial for effective implementation, the renewed EU SDS contains a governance cycle: **every two years**, the European Commission is to produce a progress report on the implementation of the strategy at the EU and Member States level. This report forms the basis for discussion at the European Council, which will give guidance to the next steps in implementation. The [first progress report](#) was issued on 22 October 2007 (European Commission, 2007) and was based on an SD indicator set and the *Monitoring Reports of Eurostat*⁴ (the [last indicators report](#) was issued in 2009; a new monitoring report is due in 2011) as well as on the national reports on implementing the EU SDS.

In July 2009, the Commission adopted the [2009 Review of EU SDS](#). It underlines that in recent years, the EU has mainstreamed sustainable development into a broad range of its policies. In particular, the EU has taken the lead in the fight against climate change and the promotion of a low-carbon economy. At the same time, unsustainable trends persist in many areas and in those areas, efforts need to be intensified.

The renewed EU SDS states that the Council at the latest in 2011 will decide whether a comprehensive review of the strategy is necessary.

³ Growth is the main objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy together with employment.

⁴ The **Eurostat monitoring report**, based on the EU set of sustainable development indicators, provides an objective, statistical picture of progress towards the goals and objectives of the EU sustainable development strategy. It is published every two years and underpins the European Commission's progress report on the implementation of the strategy.

BOX: The EU SDS in brief

Strategy	Renewed in 2006 based on the first EU SDS (Gothenburg, 2001)
Aim	Achieve SD, quality of life and well-being in Europe in the long-term
Objectives	7 key challenges: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Climate change and clean energy 2. Sustainable transport 3. Sustainable consumption & production 4. Conservation and management of natural resources 5. Public Health 6. Social inclusion, demography and migration 7. Global poverty and sustainable development challenges 2 cross-cutting policies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. education and training; b. research and development
Governance cycle	Every two years
Main documents for implementation at the national level	National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs)
Ministries responsible at the national level	Ministries of the Environment (in most cases)

2.2 The Europe 2020 Strategy

The strategy Europe 2020 was published by the [European Commission in March 2010](#) and adopted by the [European Council in June 2010](#) with the sub-heading ‘**A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**’ which represent the three “*mutually reinforcing priorities*” (EC, 2010, p.3) of the strategy:

- *Smart* growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- *Sustainable* growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy;
- *Inclusive* growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

Five EU headline targets are to be achieved by 2020 which “are representative of the three priorities of [the strategy] (...) but they are not exhaustive” (ibid.):

- 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed;
- 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D;
- the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right);
- the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree;
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.

The EU headline targets are then translated into national Europe 2020 targets that reflect the different national situations and circumstances.

To reach these targets, seven Flagship Initiatives have already been put in place. The first three are presented as describing ‘**smart growth**’ and these are:

- [A Digital Agenda for Europe](#) “to speed up the roll-out of high-speed internet and reap the benefits of a digital single market for households and firms”;
- [Innovation Union](#): “to improve framework conditions and access to finance for research and innovation so as to ensure that innovative ideas can be turned into products and services that create growth and jobs”;
- [Youth on the Move](#): “to enhance the performance of education systems and to facilitate the entry of young people to the labour market”.

Two flagship initiatives represent the idea of ‘**sustainable growth**’:

- [Resource-efficient Europe](#): “to help decouple economic growth from the use of resources, support the shift towards a low carbon economy, increase the use of renewable energy sources, modernise our transport sector and promote energy efficiency”;
- [An industrial policy for the globalisation era](#): “to improve the business environment, notably for SMEs, and to support the development of a strong and sustainable industrial base able to compete globally”;

The remaining three flagship initiatives are to contribute to the achievement of ‘**inclusive growth**’:

- [Agenda for new skills and jobs](#): “to modernise labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout the lifecycle with a view to increase labour participation and better match labour supply and demand, including through labour mobility”;
- [European platform against poverty and social exclusion](#): “to ensure social and territorial cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society”.

BOX: The 7 flagship initiatives

Flagship Initiatives documents	Date of publication	Website
A Digital Agenda for Europe	August 2010	http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/index_en.htm
Youth on the Move	September 2010	http://ec.europa.eu/youthonthemove/index_en.htm
An industrial policy for the globalisation era	October 2010	http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/industrial-competitiveness/industrial-policy/index_en.htm
Innovation Union	October 2010	http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm
Agenda for new skills and jobs	November 2010	http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=958
European platform against poverty and social exclusion	December 2010	http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=961&langId=en
Resource-efficient Europe	January 2011	http://ec.europa.eu/resource-efficient-europe/index_en.htm

2.2.1 Governance of the Europe 2020 Strategy

The Europe 2020 Strategy is organised around a thematic approach and more focused country surveillance:

1. **The thematic approach** focuses on the themes identified combining priorities and headline targets with the main instrument being the Europe2020 programme and its seven flagship initiatives;

2. **Country reporting** to help Member States to define and implement exit strategies, restore macroeconomic stability, identify national bottlenecks and return their economies to sustainable growth and public finances.

The reporting of Europe 2020 and the Stability and Growth Pact evaluation has to be done *simultaneously*, while keeping the instruments separate and maintaining the integrity of the Pact. This means proposing the annual stability or convergence programmes and streamlined reform programmes simultaneously:

- **Stability / convergence programmes**⁵ aim to ensure more rigorous budgetary discipline through surveillance and coordination of budgetary policies. In line with the *European Semester*, they are designed to coordinate economic policy-making in EU Member States. The programmes are submitted simultaneously with the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) in April of each year, before governments adopt their national budgets for the following year. They contain important information on **public finances and fiscal policy**;
- **National Reform Programmes (NRPs)** are the key delivery tool for Europe 2020 and are produced by national governments in April of each year (usually coordinated and prepared by Economic and Finance Ministries), along with stability / convergence programmes. NRPs contain national targets relating to the Europe 2020 headline targets and explain how governments intend to meet them and overcome obstacles to growth. They also set out what measures will be taken, when, by whom and with what budget implications. An overview of the NRPs of all 27 EU Member States can be found in chapter 4.2 below.

Integrated Guidelines

The [“Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines”](#) set out the framework for the Europe 2020 Strategy and for the reforms at the Member States level with the aim of ensuring that national and EU-level policies contribute fully to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy⁶. The 10 Integrated guidelines give precise guidance to the Member States on defining their National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and implementing reforms, reflecting interdependence and are in line with the Stability and Growth Pact. Therefore, Member States should design NRPs consistent with the objectives set out in the ‘Europe 2020 integrated guidelines’. The guidelines will also form the basis for any country-specific recommendations.

The “Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines” are generally linked to the headline targets and are the following:

1. Ensuring the quality and the sustainability of public finances;
2. Addressing macroeconomic imbalances;
3. Reducing imbalances in the Euro area;
4. Optimising support for R&D and innovation, strengthening the knowledge triangle and unleashing the potential of the digital economy;
5. Improving resource efficiency and reducing greenhouse gases emissions;

⁵ Under the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), *stability programmes* are produced annually by Eurozone countries; other EU countries produce *convergence programmes*.

⁶ This new set replaced the 24 guidelines that were adopted for the Lisbon strategy.

6. Improving the business and consumer environment and modernising the industrial base;
7. Increasing labour market participation and reducing structural unemployment;
8. Developing a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs, promoting job quality and lifelong learning;
9. Improving the performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary education;
10. Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty.

Guidelines for economic policies and for employment

The Treaty on the functioning of the EU provides that Member States are to regard their economic policies and promoting employment as matters of common concern and coordinate them within the Council. In two distinct articles, it provides that the Council is to adopt broad economic policy guidelines (**Article 121**) and employment guidelines (**Article 148**), specifying that the latter must be consistent with the former.

Given this legal basis, the guidelines for employment and economic policies are presented as two distinct — but intrinsically interconnected — legal instruments:

- A Council Recommendation on broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the Union -Part I of the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines;
- A Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States -Part II of the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines.

These guidelines implemented by the above mentioned legal instruments form together the integrated guidelines for implementing the Europe 2020 strategy.

Monitoring and the European Semester

Monitoring of the Europe 2020 Strategy is integrated into the "[European semester](#)" that is the new European governance architecture that was approved by the Member States on [7 September 2010](#). The European Semester means that the EU and the Eurozone countries will coordinate ex-ante their budgetary and economic policies in line with both the Stability and Growth Pact and the Europe 2020 Strategy. The six month cycle of the European Semester starts in January of each year, when the Commission presents its **Annual Growth Survey**, including a review and a forecast, integrating macroeconomic, thematic and fiscal surveillance. The spring meeting of the European Council, based on the annual growth survey, takes stock of:

- the overall macroeconomic situation;
- progress towards the five EU-level headline targets;
- progress under the Flagship Initiatives.

It provides policy orientations covering fiscal, macroeconomic structural reform and growth enhancing areas, and advises on linkages between them.

The Member States then present their medium-term budgetary strategies in their **Stability and Convergence Programmes** and set out actions to be undertaken (in areas such as employment, research, innovation, energy or social inclusion) in their **National Reform Programmes**. In April, these two documents are sent to the Commission for assessment. Based on the Commission's assessment, the Council issues **country-specific recommendations** to Member States in June/July ([country specific recommendations of 2011](#) can be downloaded from the Europe 2020 website). This means that policy advice is given to Member States before they start to finalise their draft budgets for the following year, and that the European Council assesses the overall progress in

implementing the strategy on a **yearly basis**. Policy recommendations could be addressed to Member States both in the context of the country reporting as well as under the thematic approach of Europe 2020.

What is monitored?

The EU monitors progress on 3 issues:

1) Macro-economic factors:

- Is the **macroeconomic environment** stable and conducive to growth and job creation?
- Are policies in place to address macroeconomic imbalances, macro-financial vulnerabilities and competitiveness issues with a macro-economic dimension?
- Are there **spill-over effects** (either positive or negative) from national economies, particularly in the eurozone?

2) Growth-enhancing reforms:

- How are **structural reforms** promoting R&D and innovation, resource-efficiency, a healthy business environment, employment, education and social inclusion?
- What progress is being made towards the 5 EU-wide **headline targets** and related national targets?

3) Public finances:

- What is being done to reduce government debt and budget deficits (fiscal consolidation) in the interests of sustainable public finances?
- What are the **fiscal constraints** on government policies to promote growth?

The Euro Plus Pact

A complementary agenda with additional reforms – called the Euro Plus Pact – has been agreed upon by Eurozone Member States in March 2011, as a reflection of their deeper interdependence⁷. It focuses on four areas: competitiveness, employment, sustainability of public finances, and reinforcing financial stability. It is fully embedded in the new economic governance framework, and the commitments taken therein are included in the National Reform Programmes of the concerned Member States.

2.2.2 Who is responsible for what

European Council

The European Council is *responsible for steering* the strategy through:

- **Annual overall assessments of progress** at EU and national level at its spring meeting. It takes stock of the overall macroeconomic situation and progress towards the 5 EU-wide headline targets as well as the flagship initiatives;
- **Horizontal policy guidance** for the EU and the Eurozone as a whole on the basis of the Annual Growth Survey presented by the Commission. It issues guidance at EU level covering fiscal, macroeconomic, structural reform and growth-enhancing policy areas;
- **Discussion** of economic developments and priorities for the strategy;
- **Endorsement of country specific recommendations**, on the basis of a proposal by the Commission (at its June meeting).

Council of the EU ministers

The Council of the EU (formed by national ministers responsible for the relevant policy areas) has the main tasks of **monitoring and peer review** while discussing implementation of the NRPs in their area of competence and the progress towards targets and flagship initiatives.

⁷ Also six non Euro area countries that have chosen to sign up: Bulgaria, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.

European Commission

The European Commission **annually monitors** the situation on the basis of a [set of indicators](#) showing overall progress towards the objective of smart, green and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. It issues a [yearly report](#) on the delivery of the Europe 2020 Strategy, focusing on progress towards meeting the agreed headline targets, and assesses country reports and stability and convergence programmes. As part of this process, the Commission issues policy recommendations or warnings, makes policy proposals to attain the objectives of the strategy, and presents a specific assessment of progress achieved within the euro-area.

European Parliament

The European Parliament plays an important role in the strategy, not only as **co-legislator** but also as a **driving force for mobilising citizens and national parliaments**. Each year before the Spring European Council, the European Parliament may present a resolution assessing the Europe 2020 strategy as an input for discussions.

European Economic and Social Committee

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) enables the **participation** of national social partners and civil society in the practical implementation of the Europe2020 Strategy. It focuses on co-ownership of national societal forces in Europe2020 and on mobilising trans-border networks.

Committee of the Regions

Since territorial cohesion is at the heart of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) gives support for and policy input to the implementation of the strategy: in this context, the [Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform](#) of the CoR is a tool for the local and regional authorities in the Member States to have a say in the policy process.

European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund

These two institutions play a central role in developing **new financing instruments** to respond to business needs. This can be done **in partnership with the many public initiatives** and schemes already in place at national level.

National, regional and local authorities

All national, regional and local authorities should implement the strategy, closely associating parliaments, as well as social partners and representatives of civil society, contributing to the elaboration of NRPs as well as to its implementation.

BOX: The Europe 2020 in brief

Strategy published & adopted	Published March 2010; adopted June 2010
Aim	Achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth
Objectives	<p>5 headline targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment: 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed • R&D / innovation: 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D • Climate change / energy: the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right) • Education: the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree • Poverty / social exclusion: 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty <p>To reach these targets, 7 flagship initiatives are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Innovation Union</i> • <i>Youth on the move</i> • <i>A digital agenda for Europe</i> • <i>Resource efficient Europe</i> • <i>An industrial policy for the globalisation era</i> • <i>An agenda for new skills and jobs</i> • <i>European platform against poverty</i>
Governance cycle	Annual
Main documents for implementation at the national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability / convergence programmes • National reform programmes
Ministries responsible at the national level	Ministries of Economic Affairs and/or Ministries of Finance (in most cases)

2.3 Comparing the Europe2020 Strategy and the EU SDS

Following it is shown a comparative table of the Europe 2020 strategy and of the EU SDS.

	Europe 2020	EU SDS
Main EU strategy	Europe 2020 (2010)	EU SDS (2006)
European Council discussion	Spring Council	December Council
Responsible unit at European Commission	Secretariat-General	Secretariat-General
Orientation	Aims to develop strategic solution to bring the EU out of the crisis situation and to deliver high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. It mainly focuses on economic growth and employment, but includes environmental issues (e.g. climate change, energy, resource efficiency)	Aims to achieve SD, quality of life and well-being in Europe in the long-term.
Governance Architecture	<p>The strategy is organised around a thematic approach and more focused country surveillance. More specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic approach: deliver headline targets agreed at EU level combining concrete actions at EU and national levels; • Country reporting: help Member States define and implement exit strategies to restore macroeconomic stability, identify 	<p>There are bi-annual progress reports by the European Commission that reflect on the progress towards the objectives of the EU SDS. The 2007 progress report was based on Member States reports and the Eurostat Monitoring Report; the 2009 progress report was mainly based on the Eurostat Monitoring report and not Member States reporting was undertaken.</p>

	<p>national bottlenecks and return their economies to sustainable growth and public finances.</p> <p>The monitoring of the strategy is integrated into the "European semester" (approved in September 2010).</p>	<p>The coordination with Member States is rather weak: on the one hand, NSDS objectives are not always linked to the EU SDS and, on the other hand, no institutionalised coordination with national SD coordinators – the SDS Coordinators groups has not been called since 2007.</p>
National strategy documents	<p>EU governments must produce two reports each year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability / convergence programmes: submitted before governments adopt their national budgets for the following year; • National reform programmes: simultaneously with the stability/convergence programmes, contain the elements necessary for monitoring progress towards the Europe 2020 national targets. 	<p>National SD Strategies (NSDSs), long-term strategies – weak link to renewed EU SDS (most NSDSs were developed before the EU SDS)</p>
Objectives	<p>The objectives are formulated in 3 priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation. • Sustainable growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy. • Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion. <p>This is then translated in 5 headline targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment: 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed • R&D / innovation: 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D • Climate change / energy: the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right) • Education: the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree • Poverty / social exclusion: 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty <p>To reach these goals, 7 flagship initiatives are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Innovation Union</i> • <i>Youth on the move</i> • <i>A digital agenda for Europe</i> • <i>Resource efficient Europe</i> • <i>An industrial policy for the globalisation era</i> • <i>An agenda for new skills and jobs</i> • <i>European platform against poverty</i> 	<p>7 key challenges (2006):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change and clean energy • Sustainable transport • Sustainable production and consumption • Conservation and management of natural resources • Public health • Social inclusion, demography and migration • Global poverty and SD challenges <p>2 cross-cutting policies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. education and training; b. research and development
Horizontal policy integration	<p>Focuses mainly on economic growth and employment trajectories and policies. SD issues are integrated in the strategy.</p>	<p>Aims to balance economic, social and environmental objectives, with an emphasis on the latter two. No clarification of relationship between economic growth and SD.</p>
Vertical policy integration – genesis of process	<p>Top-down genesis: Europe 2020 was adopted first.</p> <p>NRPs in Member States followed based on the 'integrated guidelines' that give a clear framework for the national level for the</p>	<p>Bottom-up genesis: most NSDSs preceded the renewed EU SDS of 2006; revised NSDSs from 2006 onwards will be brought in line with EU SDS objectives.</p>

	implementation of Europe 2020.	
Coordination between EU & member States	Each year, in June, the Commission assesses the Stability (or Convergence) Programmes and the National Reform Programmes providing country-specific recommendations as appropriate, which are then discussed and formally adopted by the Council at the end of June or in early July.	Group of Member States coordinators (SDS Coordinators Group) chaired by Secretariat-General met only twice in 2007. No institutionalised or structured coordination since then.
Governance cycle	1 year	2 years
Monitoring	Europe 2020 Indicator Set	EU SDS Indicators Set
Progress reporting period on EU and Member States level	Annual	Bi-annual
Responsible ministry at the national level (most often)	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance	Ministry of Environment
Update/review of strategy	Annual Growth Survey – Annex I “Progress Report on Europe 2020	2009 (review) & 2011 (possibly comprehensive review)

2.4 Cross check of EU SDS objectives with Europe2020 Flagship Initiatives

Based on the analysis of the 7 Flagship Initiatives of Europe 2020, we developed a table that shows how the Flagship Initiatives include the key challenges of the EU SDS and thus take up SD issues.

It is important to note that this exploration does *not claim to be exhaustive but is only a first step of a more thorough analysis* that could be undertaken only when all the ‘roadmaps’, policies and actions that operationalise the objectives the Europe 2020 Strategy will be then published. Since the 7 Flagship Initiatives provide a framework for the respective policy fields they cover, they are necessarily rather general and sometimes even vague, and they often make references to policies that have not been developed and presented yet. However, we believe that this overview is a useful starting point for discussion and further reflection.

Starting from a breakdown of the EU SDS key challenges, we checked if the respective Flagship Initiative mentioned them. More specifically, since each EU SDS key challenge is compounded by several ‘operational objectives’, we tried to understand if and how many of these were mentioned in the documents of the Flagship Initiatives:

- when *less than 25%* of operational objectives of a key challenge were mentioned in a Flagship Initiative, we marked the cell of the respective Flagship Initiative with one tick (✓);
- if *between 25% and 75%*, of operational objectives were included, we assigned two ticks (✓✓);
- if *over 75%* of operational objectives were stated in a Flagship Initiative, then we assigned three ticks (✓✓✓);
- when no mentions of operational objectives were found in a Flagship Initiative, the table shows a **red cell** signifying that the particular key challenge is not covered at all by the respective Europe 2020 flagship initiative.

BOX: Cross check of EU SDS objectives with EU2020

Cross check of EU SDS objectives with Europe 2020	A digital agenda for Europe	Innovation Union	Youth on the Move	A Resource-Efficient Europe	An Integrated Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era	An Agenda for new skills and jobs	The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion
Climate Change and clean energy "To limit climate change and its costs and negative effects to society and the environment."	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓✓		
Sustainable transport "To ensure that our transport systems meet society's economic, social and environmental needs whilst minimising their undesirable impacts on the economy, society and the environment."	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓		
Sustainable consumption and production "To promote sustainable consumption and production patterns."	✓	✓		✓✓✓	✓✓		
Conservation and management of natural resources "To improve management and avoid overexploitation of natural resources, recognising the value of ecosystem services."		✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓		
Public Health "To promote good public health on equal conditions and improve protection against health threats."	✓✓	✓✓				✓	✓✓
Social inclusion, demography and migration "To create a socially inclusive society by taking into account solidarity between and within generations and to secure and increase the quality of life of citizens as a precondition for lasting individual well-being."	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓			✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Global poverty & sustainable development challenges "To actively promote sustainable development worldwide and ensure that the European Union's internal and external policies are consistent with global sustainable development and its international commitments."				✓✓			✓✓

As can be seen in the table above, looking at the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives as an overarching framework might suggest that almost all EU SDS key challenges seem to be somehow included, with the notable exception of “global poverty & SD challenges” (which is not addressed in 5 Flagship Initiatives). However, it is not so straightforward as to discuss the **quality of this inclusion**.

Firstly, a **good number of operational objectives are very poorly addressed**. In the documents of the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives, these are mentioned only in one Flagship Initiative. For example, under the key challenge **Sustainable Transport**, the operational objective “Achieving a balanced shift towards environment friendly transport modes to bring about a sustainable transport and mobility system” is mentioned only in the Flagship Initiative *A resource efficient Europe*.

Secondly, **some other operational objectives are not addressed at all in the flagship initiatives**. Only the first EU SDS key challenge - **Climate Change and clean energy** - seems to be comprehensively addressed by Europe 2020's Flagship Initiatives. With regard to the key challenge **Sustainable Transport**, two operational objectives are not mentioned within the flagship initiatives:

1. Decoupling economic growth and the demand for transport with the aim of reducing environmental impacts;
2. Halving road transport deaths by 2010 compared to 2000.

Concerning the third key challenge, namely **Sustainable consumption and production**, although it seems generally addressed, we have noted that the following two operational objectives are mentioned only in the flagship initiative *A resource efficient Europe*:

1. Promoting sustainable consumption and production by addressing social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation;
2. The EU should seek to increase its global market share in the field of environmental technologies and eco-innovations.

The key challenge **Conservation and management of natural resources** seems comprehensively addressed mostly in the flagship initiative *A resource efficient Europe*. However, the operational objective “Contributing effectively to achieving the four United Nations global objectives on forests by 2015” is never mentioned.

With respect to **Public Health** (fifth EU SDS key challenge), one can detect a very poor consideration of its operational objectives; in particular, the following operational objectives of the key challenge are not mentioned at all under the Flagship Initiatives:

1. Continuing to promote high animal health and welfare standards in the EU and internationally;
2. Ensuring that by 2020 chemicals, including pesticides, are produced, handled and used in ways that do not pose significant threats to human health and the environment.

In addition, two other operational objectives seem to be very poorly addressed, namely: (1) Further improving food and feed legislation, including review of food labelling, and (2) Improving information on environmental pollution and adverse health impacts.

The key challenge **Social inclusion, demography and migration** appears to be particularly thoroughly addressed by the Europe 2020 Strategy. However, we noted that one operational objective under this EU SDS key challenge is never mentioned, specifically: “Reducing the negative effects of globalisation on workers and their families”.

In case of the seventh key challenge - **Global poverty and sustainable development challenges** – it seems especially poorly addressed. Half of its operational objectives are not covered at all:

1. Raise the volume of aid;

2. Promote sustainable development in the context of the WTO negotiations, in accordance with the preamble to the Marrakech Agreement establishing the World Trade Organisation which sets sustainable development as one of its main objectives;
3. Include sustainable development concerns in all EU external policies, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy, inter alia by making it an objective of multilateral and bilateral development cooperation.

The remaining operational objectives of this key challenge are also rarely considered within the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives.

2.5 The Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe

The flagship initiative “A resource-efficient Europe” called for a roadmap “to define medium and long term objectives and means needed for achieving them”. On 20 September 2011, the European Commission's [Roadmap for a resource-efficient Europe](#) was adopted. The Roadmap builds upon and complements the other initiatives under the resource efficiency flagship, in particular the policy proposals towards a low carbon economy.

The Resource Efficiency Roadmap sets out a **vision** for the structural and technological change needed up to 2050:

- *By 2050 the EU's economy has grown in a way that respects resource constraints and planetary boundaries, thus contributing to global economic transformation.*
- *Europe's economy is competitive, inclusive and provides a high standard of living with much lower environmental impacts.*
- *All resources are sustainably managed, from raw materials to energy, water, air, land and soil.*
- *Climate change milestones have been reached, while biodiversity and the ecosystem services it underpins have been protected, valued and substantially restored.*

The Roadmap sets also a series of **milestones** for the year 2020, illustrating what will be needed to put Europe on a path to resource efficient and sustainable growth. Therefore, it provides a **framework** explaining how policies interrelate and build on each other, in which future actions can be designed and implemented **coherently**. The inter-linkages between key sectors and resources and their associated EU policy initiatives are also outlined in the Communication. In particular, milestones and actions (either for the Commission and/or for Member States) are envisaged in the following areas:

1. Sustainable Consumption and Production;
2. Turning waste into a resource;
3. Supporting research and innovation;
4. Environmentally harmful subsidies and getting the prices right;
5. Ecosystem services;
6. Biodiversity;
7. Minerals and metals;
8. Water;
9. Air;

- 10. Land and Soils;
- 11. Marine Resources.

Finally, three sectors are recognised as having a major responsibility for environmental impacts: **Nutrition, Mobility and Housing**. Since these sectors are also key to address the challenges in energy and climate change, the Commission wants to maximise synergies among EU policies using the Resource Efficiency Flagship in combination with other EU complementary long-term strategies and the measures included in the Roadmap. Again, also these three sectors are assigned with milestones for 2020 and suggested actions. In particular:

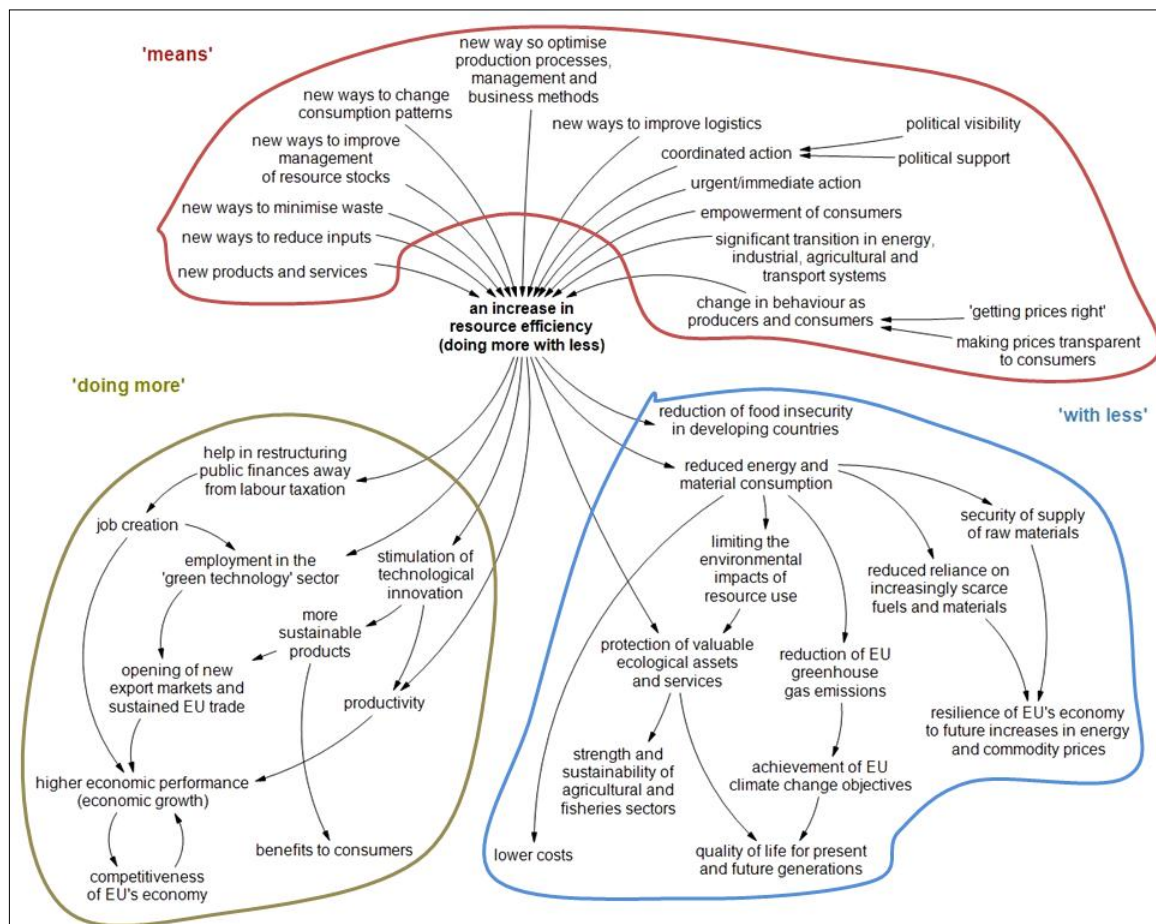
1. **Food Milestone** – *“By 2020, incentives to healthier and more sustainable food production and consumption will be widespread and will have driven a 20% reduction in the food chain's resource inputs. Disposal of edible food waste should have been halved in the EU”;*
2. **Buildings Milestone** – *“By 2020 the renovation and construction of buildings and infrastructure will be made to high resource efficiency levels. The Life-cycle approach will be widely applied; all new buildings will be nearly zero-energy and highly material efficient, and policies for renovating the existing building stock will be in place so that it is cost-efficiently refurbished at a rate of 2% per year. 70% of non-hazardous construction and demolition waste will be recycle”;*
3. **Mobility milestone** – *“By 2020 overall efficiency in the transport sector will deliver greater value with optimal use of resources like raw materials, energy, and land, and reduced impacts on climate change, air pollution, noise, health, accidents, biodiversity and ecosystem degradation. Transport will use less and cleaner energy, better exploit a modern infrastructure and reduce its negative impact on the environment and key natural assets like water, land and ecosystems. There will be on average a 1% yearly reduction, beginning in 2012, in transport GHG emissions”.*

Transforming the EU into a more resource efficient economy will require concerted action across a wide range of policies. This is why the Commission is putting attention particularly on **governance and monitoring** and proposes to launch a joint effort with stakeholders to work on defining the right **indicators and targets** for guiding actions and monitoring progress. At the same time, the concrete necessity is recognised of **investing in the transition** towards a resource efficient Europe while, on the other hand, supporting resource efficiency internationally: *by 2020 resource efficiency will be a shared objective of the international community, and progress will have been made towards it based on the approaches agreed in Rio.*

Interlude: Resource Efficient Europe – a systems map

We have conducted a brief analysis of the content and discourse reflected in the Resource-Efficient Europe flagship initiative of the Europe 2020 Strategy, focusing primarily on the causal relationships present in the Flagship Initiative communication by the European Commission. We used some tools of discourse analysis and an adapted

causal mapping methodology primarily on descriptions of the context and policy measures as well as on justifications for policy intervention. The results are presented in the following figure.



There is a number of presented 'means' (policy measures intended to achieve an increase in resource efficiency and their features; presented in the upper part of the figure). The document does not establish any obviously meaningful relationships between the proposed measures – be they integrative (groupings of measures into policy mixes for achieving joint effects) or distributive (assigning of measures to concrete sectors or resources). In some cases it is not entirely clear whether the concepts presented are seen as causes or effects of an increase in resource efficiency. In this respect the draft Roadmap (see below) provides a fuller picture.

On the whole and as presented in the communication of the European Commission, the resource-efficiency flagship initiative seems to have **two large areas of effects**. Conceptually we can link them to the central statement characterising resource efficiency, 'doing more with less'. The first area of effects is attributable to the 'doing more' part of the statement (the area on the lower left side of the figure): more innovation, more productivity, more employment, more products, more trade and as a result more economic growth.⁸ The second area of effects is linked to the 'with less' part of the statement (the area on the lower right side of the figure): fewer inputs (i.e.

⁸ Note that most of the relationships between effects are not directly mentioned in the text.

reduction of overall resource use), less costs, less reliance on resources, less waste and emissions, less damage to ecosystems. There should also be, of course, some linkages between these two areas of effects, e.g. lower costs would positively affect some of the economic performance concepts on the left, and employment, economic performance or benefits to consumers would positively influence quality of life. There seem to be several major end-goals: EU's economic performance (focusing in particular on competitiveness, job creation and several sectors such as agriculture, transport or energy), resilience of EU's economy to resource scarcities, improvement of life conditions in developing countries and quality of life for present and future generations.

Resource efficiency is a concept linking these two areas of effects and facilitating their relationship of dynamic interdependence. It is not entirely clear which of the two areas of effects, 'doing more' or 'with less', would be preferred in case of a conflicting trade-off. It would seem that historically the 'doing more' area has been preferred.⁹ It is important to add, however, that the higher the factor or resource efficiency improvement, the more 'manoeuvring space' to defuse trade-offs is created between these two areas.

Resource efficiency is thus presented as a solution to the conundrum of economic development and quality of the environment, a conflict which has been perceived since the late 1960s. It also seems to have the ambition to replace the concept which has occupied that exact spot in the global environmentalist discourse since mid-1980s: sustainable development. However, as presented in the Commission communication document, **the resource-efficiency flagship initiative is first and foremost an economic and 'economising' project**. Through a number of strategies it discursively 'economises' the nature–society relationship: (i) its central objectives seem to put the wellbeing of the economy before that of nature or people; (ii) it commodifying nature through 'resources' which can be measured, managed, priced and exchanged (note that already the term 'environment' serves as a 'technicised' and instrumentalised interpretation of nature); (iii) ascribing a certain privileged positions to businesses; and (iv) on the one hand, isolating an amorphous mass of EU population as passive beneficiaries of a well-working economy, and on the other hand, providing a way to participate through adoption of consumer identities.

The Flagship Initiative also presents an ambiguous relationship towards regions outside of Europe. On the one hand, it sets goals benefitting the developing countries (reduction of food insecurity, poverty reduction in resource-reliant developing countries) and achieving an efficient global use of scarce resources, but on the other hand, the non-EU area is seen as a source of risk (a place where employment might be 'shifted'), as a necessity for economic prosperity of the EU (a market for exports by EU manufacturers, a source of raw materials necessary for the EU industry) and as a problematic partnership (i.e. a direct competition with 'partners' such as Japan or China in the speed of implementation of resource-efficiency policy initiatives).

⁹ Also note that on more than one occasion environmental protection measures are framed as threats to competitiveness.

Interestingly, the following **draft Roadmap** used a different language and, presumably, was written by a different group of authors. It would seem that the Roadmap attempted to shape a new discourse – one where the relationship between ‘economy’ and ‘the environment’ would not be in conflict. A circular, reflexive and iterative perspective (e.g. life cycle, rebound, re-use, re-cycle) had a key position in this discourse, as well as a metaphor of a ‘safe operating space’ within certain limits/planetary boundaries. This discursive strategy is, however, not without problems (the Roadmap wanted, for example, to overcome ‘having to protect the environment from economic activity’). The Roadmap presented a much more elaborate set of measures which were distributed into a grid along five dimensions – aspects of the transformation of the EU economy, key resources, key sectors and governance aspects as well as time (the Roadmap utilised three time horizons – immediate or short-term action (2011–2014), medium-term milestone of 2020 and long-term vision of 2050; for more details see above). It attributed a much more pronounced role to scientific knowledge and the argumentation in the document was also significantly more in line with what can be seen as Western academic discourse patterns – e.g. the analysis aiming at structural causes, elaborated causal relationships in general, ways of usage of figures and quantitative data, usage of references etc. In contrast to the Flagship Initiative, it was also closer to ‘sustainable development’ as it is understood in the pro-environmental discourse even though its primary thrust was still economic (the object, the ‘needed policy framework’ etc.).

In comparison to the draft the **final version of the Roadmap** published 20 September 2011 contains several certain key modifications in language, style and framing which make the Roadmap slightly more similar to the Flagship Initiative communication. One of the most pronounced differences lies in the framing, i.e. the justification of the Roadmap: where the draft Roadmap used the metaphor of the scale of economic activity as a reason for nearing or overstepping the limits as the ‘big picture’, the final Roadmap places the resource-efficiency project in the context of the need ‘to further develop our wealth and wellbeing’. There are new formulations which have the function to place the functioning of markets mechanisms in regards to resource scarcity in a more positive light as well as to weaken the acceptance of regulation by the reader. This can be illustrated on the issue of environmental taxation: the final Roadmap emphasises the negatives related to taxation and where environmental taxation is promoted it is justified by fiscal revenues and competitiveness, whereas in the draft the environmental taxation was presented as correcting market failures; in the final Roadmap a quantified objective for environmental taxation is placed at the current level of best-performing Member States, whereas the draft called for a ‘substantial increase’. In several places of the final Roadmap there is a slight return to business-friendly rhetoric and businesses are mainly presented in the role of needing to face the burden of rising costs and having to make the ‘sensible’ move to resource efficiency. The final Roadmap also seems to place a slightly larger responsibility on the consumers. Another marked feature is a slight move away from the circular perspective which was one of the key ‘models’ of the draft Roadmap and an increased emphasis on the economic functions of resources (resources as being critical for concrete sectors or economic activities, as business opportunities or as risks to the economy). In several places the reformulations reflect a move away from the more critical and detached style characteristic for the academic discourse (‘we are far away from ... a “circular economy”’) towards a more positively-sounding and objective-led style characteristic of policy documents (‘as we move towards ... a “circular

economy”). The changes in the proposed measures and milestone between these two versions – which particularly in the dimension of governance and monitoring seem to be significant – would, however, require a more detailed analysis that we can provide here.

3 Overview of Rio+20 theme “institutional framework for SD”

In 2012, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) will be hosted again in Rio de Janeiro, 20 years after the first Earth Summit in 1992. The conference, commonly referred to as ‘Rio+20’, will have **three objectives**:

1. to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development,
2. to assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and
3. to address new and emerging challenges

The Conference will address **two themes**:

1. Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication;
2. Institutional framework for sustainable development.

Due to the topic of this QR, this section focuses on the second theme that considers “the governance of sustainable development globally, regionally, nationally and locally - the role of institutions, processes, structures, guiding principles, integration, coordination and communication in providing an enabling framework for implementing commitments to sustainable development” (Stakeholder Forum, 2011, p.4).

3.1 Institutional framework for Sustainable Development¹⁰

The main question of this theme addresses is: *“How do we strengthen the institutional framework for sustainable development at all levels?”*

Over the years, a number of institutions have been formally established to enhance the convergence between economic, social and environmental goals:

- at the **global level**, the principal policymaking institution is the *UN Commission on Sustainable Development*;
- at the **regional level**, the regional commissions have organized ministerial conferences and implementation meetings;
- at the **national level**, a number of institutional formats have emerged, i.e. national sustainable development councils or national sustainable development strategies;
- at **local levels**, local Agenda 21 processes were developed by local institutions and urban municipalities.

There is a growing interest to find out whether explicit changes to the institutional framework for sustainable development would help in bringing about greater coherence between the different goals.

Although a number of suggestions along these lines have been made, the Report of Secretary-General points out one major goal, that is:

¹⁰ The following sections are based on the UN documents and UN web-pages.

“to clarify that sustainable development is not restricted to the environmental pillar, and therefore that the test for sustainable development lies in the extent to which its three components are brought together.” (UN, 2010, p.23)

In addition, there are five points that the report highlights in terms of necessary changes for the institutional framework for sustainable development:

1. Strengthening coherence at national levels;
2. System-wide ownership and effective participation of the international organisations;
3. From policy to implementation: the adoption of a decision is important but the implementation of this has to be strengthened and concrete actions have to follow;
4. Mobilizing major groups: to enhance participation and to allow active civil society engagement;
5. Partnerships among Governments, major groups and other national and international institutions should be boosted not only with the objective to implement decisions of the Commission.

The Commission on sustainable development is the most important institution for global sustainable development governance and, therefore, represents the **high-level forum for sustainable development** within the United Nations system. In the context of the institutional framework for SD, three other entities are of major importance:

1. the UN **General Assembly (GA)**,
2. the **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** as the main body for ensuring coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on issues of economic and social development; and
3. the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** that is the key important actor concerning international environmental governance.

Within the United Nations, also the **Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs** has played a role in enhancing system-wide coherence over economic and social goals. Besides this, **UN-Water**, **UN-Energy** and **UN-Oceans** have been established to promote system-wide coherence in the areas of their competence. On the other hand, for a wide range of sectors under Agenda 21, no sectoral mechanisms exist and there is the necessity for the United Nations to consider the utility of creating a new inter-agency mechanism to ensure future coordination on sustainable development.

In addition, progress towards sustainable development needs to be supported by institutional reform, not only at the global level, but also at the national level. **National councils for sustainable development (NCSDs)** have been a major institutional innovation, bringing non-governmental stakeholders directly into policy consultations and decision-making processes. **National sustainable development strategies (NSDSs)** have proved to be key for sustainable development.

3.1.1 Promote Sustainable Development Governance at the National and Local Levels

Recently, the High Level Dialogue on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) was held in Solo (Indonesia) on 19-21 July 2011 with the objective of supporting the preparatory process for Rlio+20. Among other topics, the discussion reviewed progress in institutional development at various levels and identified remaining problems - namely, implementation gaps, lack of coherence and integration, added pressure of emerging challenges (i.e. scarcities of natural resources and sinks).

A key issue addressed by the [High Level Dialogue Discussion Paper](#) was to **promote sustainable development governance at the national and local levels**. With this objective, several suggestions were offered for discussion.

With respect to ‘*Strategies to improve cross-sectoral coordination and coherence in implementation of the sustainable development agenda*’, a special attention is given to **NSDSs which are regarded as a good and flexible way to develop a national approach to sustainable development** with stakeholders, and in so doing ensuring that not only are sectors dealt with effectively but also that a **cross-sectoral integration** is approached.

Particular appreciation is assigned to the approach suggested by the [European Sustainable Development Network \(ESDN\)](#) to NSDSs, in which NSDSs are built around 7 key points:

1. Common vision and strategic objectives;
2. High-level commitment;
3. Horizontal integration;
4. Vertical integration;
5. Participation;
6. Implementation mechanisms and capacity-building;
7. Monitoring, evaluation and strategy renewal.

In the High Level Dialogue’s discussion paper it is therefore advanced:

In light of UNCSD 2012 all countries could engage in developing new sustainable development strategies which would look to focus on the next stage at the green economy. Such strategies should learn from previous ones and be linked to adequate financial resources.

Within the aim of ‘Enhancing the contribution of civil society to decision-making at national and local levels’, a first key message has to be highlighted: “Government coordination at the national level would have a great impact on the ability of the UN and IFIs to coordinate at a global level”. With this in mind, since in many countries Ministries of Environment are not among the key Ministries of State, it is suggested to establish a unit within the office of the Prime Minister or Foreign Minister to seek policy and strategic coherence among government departments operating within intergovernmental arenas.

The national level

In fact, at the national level:

- effective national environmental governance supports and complements efforts to improve international mechanisms for sustainable development;
- effective national environmental governance helps ensure that parties to international environmental agreements actually enjoy the benefits that those agreements are supposed to provide;
- effective national environmental governance also helps advance protection of marginalized and poor communities;
- sound national governance contributes to a level playing field for businesses operating globally and helps avoid the emergence of pollution havens in places lacking effective environmental governance.

National Councils on Sustainable Development

Over the years, National Councils on Sustainable Development spread around the world achieving a number of successes in the SD arena:

- they have proven to be a very effective way for governments to consult with stakeholders and sectors of society;
- they have helped to build support for potentially difficult legislation;
- they have also produced important national policies and strategies on sustainable development.

There have also been weaknesses of enabling conditions of NCSDs; e.g., they are easily abolished if not created under a legal mandate as governments or priorities change. They need to be adequately funded and most have not been. The most successful ones have been linked to the Office of the Prime Minister (Finland and Philippines).

It is then suggested that UNCSD 2012 could reactivate and reinvigorate the national multi-stakeholder forums, such as National Councils for Sustainable Development, to follow up UNCSD 2012, with mandates for:

- Outreach, for consultation and feedback, to their constituencies in the country;
- Development of guidance on implementation strategies within a country;
- Review: Development of national reports;
- Development of national targets for policy, strategies and future implementation.

In light of the focus of UNCSD 2012 on the green economy, such councils might consider establishing or strengthening their relationship with national economic councils which already exist in many countries.

Green Ministers

Coming from the UK experience of the Green Ministers' Committee, which was able to introduce a targeted and coordinated approach to procurement policy and education of officials across government, the Discussion Paper suggests the opportunity “of designating a Green Minister in each government department [in order] to ensure stronger horizontal linkage and accountability”.

The subnational level

At the subnational level, in 2002 a new body was created to deal with sustainable development: it was called the Network of Regional Government for Sustainable Development. Subnational governments, because of their intermediate position between the national and local levels:

- are particularly well placed for identifying the needs and capabilities of their societies for sustainable development;
- are also often responsible for the elaboration and implementation of policy, legislation programmes, fiscal mechanisms and public investment plans in areas such as climate action, transport, energy, the environment, agriculture, forestry, industry, spatial planning, resource management, technology development and transfer, civil protection and development cooperation;
- have been effective at addressing sustainable development challenges, as well the economic difficulties by turning these challenges into opportunities to transition towards greener, smarter and more inclusive societies;
- have implemented extensive initiatives that have facilitated the success of multiple sustainable development policies (i.e. Agenda 21, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, nature and biodiversity conservation measures, public procurement strategies and development cooperation projects.)

Therefore, it is suggested to increase the role for subnational level government in implementing sustainable development agreements, and to forward the establishment of multi-stakeholder subnational councils on sustainable development to help facilitate this role.

The local level

Institutions at the local level are strong driving forces for implementing national sustainable development strategies. For a strategy to succeed, it should reflect the needs and aspirations of the local people, and at the same time be fully backed by adequate commitment from the local level for its implementation. Indeed, it is the people at the local level who are the direct beneficiaries of the strategy process and the real driving forces for forging integration, country-driven, multi-stakeholder ‘ownership’, and strong political commitment.

Possibly one of the most significant chapters of Agenda 21, as far as inspiring a sector of society, was that regarding Local Authorities initiatives to support the agenda. By 2002, over 2000 Local Agenda 21s had been established around the world. Local authorities have been playing an increasingly significant role in taking global agreements to the local level. Over the last twenty years, local authorities have developed programs and projects to promote a participatory, long-term, strategic planning process that addresses local sustainability, while protecting global common goods.

Therefore, **local sustainable development governance** has today become a reality in many countries. It now features the active inclusion of a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector actors in carrying out policy on the ground.

With regards to the local level, though, the suggestion for UNCSD 2012 is to consider a similar text to 1992: (i) to encourage local government to take the lead in bringing together local stakeholders and (ii) to work on taking forward the recommendations from the UN Conference at a local level.

BOX: Main points for strengthening the Institutional Framework for SD (High Level Dialogue, Solo)¹¹

Conceptual:

- ensuring holistic and integrated approach to development;
- strengthening governance at local, national, regional and global levels, with a focus of greater integration among the 3 pillars;

Local and national levels:

- sustainable utilization of natural resources and environmental management;
- SD actions at the local and national levels need to be governed nationally and locally, allowing for coherence of sustainable development policies;
- traditional knowledge, local wisdom and strong enforcement were noted as key success factors;

Sub-regional, regional and global levels:

- coordination and coherence at the sub-regional, regional and global levels;
- coherence within and amongst UN agencies to Deliver-as-one;
- strong governance structure, coupled with enhanced engagement of major groups at these levels;

Institutional reform:

- reforming institutions to implement sustainable development at all levels;
- fragmentation amongst institutions at the national, regional and global levels should be eliminated;
- a more effective arrangement needs to be built in order to provide leadership and direction to tackle global environmental challenges;
- necessity to learn from past experiences and best practices from previous institutional reforms within the UN bodies;

Implementation:

- the importance of financing to support implementation;
- raise the level of commitment and political will to create the enabling environment for sustainable development;
- political will is absolutely crucial;

Integration:

- build new arrangements that are capable of providing strong leadership in tackling major SD challenges;
- integrated structures at the global level are required to support coordinated implementation of SD at the national and local levels;
- eliminate duplication;
- streamline integration at the sub-regional and regional levels.

At the end of the High Level Dialogue, in order to move the discussion forward the IFSD, the so-called ‘[Solo Message](#)’ was presented by the Chair with the aim of focusing the attention on the following important needs:

1. to renew **political commitment** for sustainable development, with high attention on its **implementation**;
2. to ensure that the economic, social and environmental pillars work together with each pillar **integrating the goals** of the two other pillars;
3. to enhance the **integration** of sustainable development at the international level;

¹¹ From ‘[Notes of the sessions of high level dialogue on institutional framework for sustainable development](#)’

4. to increase **integrated support** for national strategies at the national level;
5. to strengthen **UNEP**;
6. to review, support and strengthen **sustainable development governance** at the local, national and regional level;
7. to provide adequate and additional **financing** in order to enable **implementation, capacity building** and **technology transfer**.

3.2 How the EU prepares for Rio+20

In preparation of RIO+20 conference, the European Commission wrote a [communication](#) to put forward the position of the European Union (EC, 2011). In this document, the Commission supports the objectives of the Rio+20 Conference to *start of an accelerated and profound, world-wide transition towards a green economy* and to *launch the needed reform of international sustainable development governance*.

In respect to the first objective, the European Commission argues to be a strong supporter of the **green economy** which is seen as an effective way of promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty and addressing emerging challenges and outstanding implementation gaps. Therefore, the green economy is addressed as the necessary way to deliver the **right kind of growth and development** while, at the same time, improving human well-being, providing decent jobs, reducing inequalities, tackling poverty and preserving the natural capital. The way to achieve the transition to a green economy must therefore take into consideration three policy dimensions that are interlinked:

1. Investing in the sustainable management of key resources and natural capital ("**what**");
2. Establishing the right market and regulatory conditions ("**how**");
3. Improving governance and private sector involvement ("**who**").

Also, the Commission argues for a renewed impetus to sustainable development that considers not only the creation of *a shared vision for change*, but also considers the necessity of a *framework for specific action to deliver results*. Therefore, four key points are suggested:

1. A broad political "rallying call" with a shared, ambitious vision and goals;
2. a set of specific actions at international, regional and national level - mapped out as a "Green Economy Roadmap";
3. a "toolbox" of policy approaches and best practice examples to be used to reach agreed objectives;
4. a mechanism to promote and monitor overall progress.

While agreeing with the need to **strengthen sustainable development governance**, the EU Commission clearly backs the points raised by the Solo Message presented above.

With an eye on the European situation, the communication briefly presents the initiatives undertaken for sustainable development by the EU in the past years with a mention of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. Particular attention is devoted to

the Europe 2020 Strategy, presented as the key policy development in this regard, with the aims to:

- transform the EU into a knowledge-based, resource efficient and low-carbon economy;
- provide a sustainable response to the challenges facing the EU up to 2050;
- mainstream and reinforce the role of sustainability in policy development.

The importance of the Europe 2020 strategy is therefore remarked:

“Rio+20 will be a defining moment for sustainable development, both in the EU and globally. Its outcome will inspire the EU's strategy and actions for sustainable development, and in particular help further shape the EU Europe 2020 strategy as an effective tool for delivering on sustainable development.” (EC, 2011, p.4)

4 Policy strategies at the national level: NSDSs and NRP at the European level

This chapter provides an overview of national policy strategies, and their related governance processes, that aim to implement the EU SDS and the Europe 2020 Strategy. This first sub-chapter takes stock of National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs), and by so doing, gives an overview of experiences with SD governance in the EU Member States. The second sub-chapter gives an overview of National Report Programmes, the main implementation tools at the national level of the Europe 2020 Strategy. It lists the NRPs of all EU Member States and looks into their similarities and differences.

4.1 National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs)

4.1.1 Introduction

NSDSs are considered to be among the prime tools for realising governance for sustainable development (SD). They date back to 1992 and Agenda 21 which suggested that:

“[g]overnments (...) should adopt a national strategy for sustainable development ensur[ing] socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations”.

(Agenda 21, [Chapter 8 Integrating environment and development in decision-making](#))

Many countries started preparing their own NSDSs towards the end of 1990s, culminating in a relatively speedy preparation in most of the European countries shortly before the 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. In addition to Agenda 21 and the linkage to the Rio commitments, NSDS development was spurred by further UN’s work, by OECD and by the EU through the European Council’s Presidency Conclusion from Gothenburg 2001, which marked the first **EU Sustainable Development Strategy** (EU SDS). NSDSs received highest attention internationally during 2000–2004 with a watershed of guidelines and assessments of early NSDS attempts by scholars, practitioners and international agencies¹². On the basis of the renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EC, 2006), all EU Member States were asked to finalise their NSDSs (if they had not prepared one before) by 2007 and to address linkages between their NSDSs and the EU SDS in future NSDS reviews.

NSDSs aim “to mobilize and focus a society’s efforts to achieve sustainable development” (Carew-Reid et al. 1994). They should provide a forum for societal articulation of a vision of the future, as well as a framework for processes of negotiation, mediation and consensus, and capacity building (ibid.). According to Agenda 21, NSDSs

¹² Most notably Heidbrink & Paulus, 2000; OECD, 2000; UK DFID et al., 2000; Kirkpatrick et al., 2001; OECD, 2001a; Dalal-Clayton & Bass, 2002c; Dalal-Clayton et al., 2002; IIED et al., 2002; UNDESA, 2002; EC, 2004; Swanson et al., 2004.

“should be developed through the widest possible participation” and “build upon and harmonize the various sectoral economic, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country” as well as be “based on a thorough assessment of the current situation and initiatives”. After the first experiences with NSDSs, it has been understood that in order for NSDSs to remain continuously relevant as well as improve over time, they need a cyclical, iterative process with results of monitoring and evaluation feeding further debate and objective setting¹³.

NSDSs should serve to achieve *better policy coordination and integration* in several dimensions:

- **Horizontally:** across policy sectors;
- **Vertically:** across political-administrative levels as well as territorially;
- **Temporally:** across time; and
- **Across societal sectors:** public, private, academia, civil society.

NSDSs also became increasingly understood as vehicles for an ambitious governance reform, marrying the better regulation/good governance agenda with the principles of sustainable development (see EC, 2005; Steurer, 2009). The goal is therefore:

- to incrementally transform national policy-making in the direction of a more network-oriented and effective multi-level governance;
- fostering a change towards openness, transparency and public/stakeholder participation; and
- improving the knowledge processes related to decision making so decisions are made on the basis of sound evidence and integrated understanding of the effects of the decision and the involved trade-offs (see e.g. OECD, 2001b; EC, 2005).

4.1.2 Differences in NSDSs

NSDSs are very different from country to country. There is no blueprint for NSDSs. According to the European Commission (EC, 2004), NSDSs can take the form of:

- **framework strategies** “set out general policy directions and guidance for sustainable development, combined with broad lines of action for specific problem areas”, aiming to change processes of policy development and implementation, and relying on separate (sectoral) action plans and annual work programmes as means of implementation (EC 2004, p. 11);
- **action programmes** with “concrete, short and medium-term objectives, with strict timetables and detailed measures” (ibid.);
- **mixed approaches** with the NSDSs serving as framework documents but still containing very detailed policy actions are quite common.

In addition, NSDSs also differ in **scope**, **objectives**, **topic areas** and **measures** (as well as the mechanisms of their implementation). Given the differing contexts NSDSs were developed in, they vary also in terms of their **mandate** (to what extent they are binding for sectoral ministries or sub-national authorities) and **institutional setup** (organisations responsible for their implementation, institutional mechanisms for policy coordination or stakeholder involvement).

¹³ See for example: UNDESA 2001b, Dalal-Clayton and Bass 2002a, OECD 2001b.

Typically, the Ministries of Environment are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the National Sustainable Development Strategies.

4.1.3 Comparative stock-taking of NSDSs in European countries

This sub-chapter is based on a comparative overview of NSDS processes for 29 European countries that was undertaken for the [ESDN Quarterly Report of September 2010](#). This QR provided an overview of NSDS processes in the 27 EU Member States, plus Norway and Switzerland, on the following topics:

- a) general profile of the NSDSs;
- b) vertical policy coordination mechanisms;
- c) horizontal policy coordination mechanisms;
- d) evaluation and review processes;
- e) monitoring and SD indicators;
- f) participation mechanisms.

(i) General profile of NSDSs in Europe

In total, 28 countries have developed an NSDS and one country has a strategic approach on SD but no strategy document (The Netherlands).

The **NSDS processes** vary across countries. Only a few have managed to place it at the core of their national policy planning (i.e. Latvia, Poland), linked the strategy with the general government program (i.e. Switzerland), or reached a better coordination of objectives and goals with other government documents. In most countries, NSDSs are one policy strategy among many other policy strategies. Furthermore, although SD is an overarching concept, the NSDSs have not developed into overarching policy strategies for all governmental departments.

Regarding **institutional anchoring** of NSDSs, the main coordinating bodies for NSDS processes are usually the Ministries of Environment (in 19 out of 29 countries). Ministries of Environment seem to have the best developed capacity and knowledge for SD. However, they often lack resources and high level political profile compared to other government ministries. In some countries, NSDS processes are now coordinated by the Prime Ministers Offices or State Chancelleries (e.g. Germany, Estonia).

(ii) Vertical policy coordination mechanisms

In most countries, the NSDSs are only a binding a policy strategy for the national government. A notable exception is Austria, the only country in Europe that has adopted a federal SD strategy, binding both for the national and the regional level, and for which appropriate mechanisms are provided.

Generally, **vertical policy coordination** mechanisms vary substantially across countries. One can broadly distinguish three groups of countries:

1. Countries that have developed **well-coordinated vertical mechanisms** with intensive collaboration among the various political levels in the NSDS process (i.e. Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Finland, France, UK) and those that are in the

- progress of intensifying vertical coordination (i.e. Belgium, Latvia) by further promoting stronger cooperation;
2. Countries that have developed a **certain level of vertical policy coordination** through consultation mechanisms among the various political levels in the NSDS process (i.e. Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Sweden);
 3. Countries that have **no separate vertical coordination mechanisms** and the cooperation in the NSDS process is almost exclusively based on information exchanging platforms (i.e. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain).

(iii) **Horizontal policy coordination mechanisms**

The concept of SD does not only emphasise the need for vertical but also for horizontal policy coordination, i.e. the **integration of different policy sectors**. Generally, all EU Member States have developed various forms of inter-ministerial and cross-departmental mechanisms for coordinating the implementation of NSDSs objectives. The format of these mechanisms varies from inter-ministerial working groups to committees or networks.

The developments observed in horizontal integration vary mostly regarding the following factors:

Institutional structure

Horizontal mechanisms are categorized on the basis of their institutional structure:

- *Inter-ministerial bodies at the political level:* in this case, the inter-ministerial body is chaired by politicians or high-level administrators (e.g. in Austria, Germany, Latvia, Norway, Malta, Spain, Ireland).
- *Inter-ministerial bodies at the administrative level:* participants are mainly representatives of the national administration (ministries) under the lead of the Ministry of Environment (e.g. Belgium², Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, Romania, Switzerland and United Kingdom).
- *Hybrid regimes:* in this third group, the processes of horizontal policy coordination (politicians and administrators) are enriched by participation and consultation processes of societal stakeholders (NGOs, business, academia, civil society), e.g. Finland's National Sustainable Development Council and Ministry of Environment, the Government Council for SD in Czech Republic, the NCSD in Hungary³, Slovakia and Slovenia).

Roles of horizontal mechanisms

The horizontal mechanisms (at work in the various inter-ministerial bodies at both the political, administrative and hybrid regimes levels) fulfil the following roles:

- a coordination function in the preparation of the NSDS;
- a coordination function in the implementation of the NSDS:
 - either through governmental action plans presenting specific measures for the departments (like work programs in Austria) or,

- by encouraging the development of departmental action plans (e.g. Belgium and UK) and audit systems or by promoting the integration of NSDS targets in the target-setting of the implementation of the sectoral strategies;
- a review and ‘watch-dog’ function: it promotes the collection of information from the ministries in the implementation of the NSDS and monitors the progress of the NSDS.

The inter-ministerial institutions share all of the aforementioned roles in horizontal policy coordination, but also display some differences. Horizontal mechanisms which are steered from inter-ministerial bodies at the administrative level have more a *preparatory policy-making function*. They do not replace any usual decision-making mechanisms. In contrast, the countries locating the horizontal policy coordination institutionally at the higher-level also share a *political guidance and steering function*. This function is reflected in influencing the pace of implementation of the NSDSs in sectoral policies. In countries such as Germany and Austria, where the horizontal mechanisms have not only a preparatory policy function but also decision-making competences through the Chancellery, an increased linkage of political leadership with horizontal coordination is considered to be the case. In cases where horizontal mechanisms are coordinated by hybrid regimes (e.g. NCSDs), they serve an agenda setting⁴ and advisory function to the government on SD issues, providing recommendations based on its wide consultation processes with various societal actors.

Outcomes

The interviews revealed that: (a) the institutional profile of the horizontal mechanisms affects the performance on policy coordination and integration: the higher the political profile of horizontal policy mechanisms, the more visible is the NSDS process for the politicians; (b) horizontal policy integration fosters and strengthens inter-ministerial cooperation and dialogues.

Various implementation tools for horizontal policy integration have been developed in the countries such as

- departmental action plans in line with the NSDS (e.g. UK, Belgium, Finland),
- departmental reports on the implementation of the NSDS in specific policy fields (i. e. Germany),
- national SD action plans for the various departments (i.e. work programmes in Austria, National Development Plan in Latvia)
- preparation of policy framing reports on crucial SD issues based on inter-ministerial consultations (i.e. for the preparation of ‘Focus Reports’ inter-ministerial efforts are required in Estonia),
- various strategies and action plans for the implementation of the Agenda 21.

(iv) Evaluation and review

NSDSs are not only strategic documents but also foster strategic processes. As NSDS processes need to adapt to new situations and challenges constantly, the evaluation of these policy processes and the achievement of the NSDS targets are important and have been introduced in almost all European countries. The review processes of NSDSs can take three forms:

- **Internal reviews:** are conducted within the government ministries by the institution responsible for the review process. Usually, this depends on the country's institutional setting and on the particular institution charged with SD tasks. However, in the majority of the countries, review processes are undertaken by horizontal mechanisms and inter-ministerial bodies also responsible for the implementation of NSDSs;
- **External reviews:** not all countries envisage to rely on an external review. However, there is a trend towards a more prominent employment of it. Two options are usually employed: either a private consultant or independent researchers;
- **Peer reviews:** only France (2005), Norway (2006), the Netherlands (2006) and Germany (2009) have conducted peer reviews. The idea behind the peer reviews of the NSDS within the EU is to identify and share good practices in a process of mutual learning. The process should be a bottom-up exercise with participatory elements, involving stakeholders from all political levels.

Countries usually employ the findings of their reviews to improve the development of a renewed NSDS or the implementation of their current NSDS. The contribution of the reviews is particularly important because it reveals that countries seem to experience similar problems:

- some lack vertical integration or political commitment;
- goals seem often to be too broad while the means not adequate or the implementation insufficient;
- no clear mandates are established or relevant stakeholders are not included;
- in some countries, horizontal coordination seems still to be a problem while in others, there is a lack of ownership from the ministries for NSDS.

(v) **Monitoring and indicators**

Monitoring is an observational activity, mostly based on a set of quantitative indicators. The higher and stronger the link between indicators and policy objectives in the NSDSs, the more measurable are the deliveries of the strategy. This section shortly outlines the status quo in development and revision of the set of indicators, and their utilization in the NSDS review process:

1. **Set-up and revision of SD indicators:** most countries have developed a set of SD indicators together with the development of their NSDSs. A majority of countries, while revising their NSDS, also have begun up-dating their indicators to new key SD challenges and topics, by better integration of sub-national levels;
2. **Institutions:** few European countries possess completely independent bodies (i.e. non-governmental) that are responsible for the development and monitoring of SD indicators. Most countries collaborate with their national statistical offices for obtaining data. Statistical units within ministries usually perform the development and monitoring task and publish monitoring reports; only a few countries have not yet established such mechanisms;
3. **Monitoring process:** the monitoring reports show the status and progress of SD within the country. The monitoring processes vary among countries, based on timing and on institutional capacities. Only a few countries have developed regular SDI monitoring cycles (i.e. bi-annually);

4. **Utilization:** SD indicators and their assessment are generally integrated in the progress reports. The SD indicator reports are also used for external evaluation or peer reviews.

(vi) Participation and consultation processes in NSDSs

During the development of their current NSDSs, all countries have brought in contributions from across government ministries, and have involved stakeholders from various sectors and interest groups. Governments are making substantial efforts in broadening the involvement of stakeholder groups in order to strengthen the ownership of the NSDSs. Additionally, new mechanisms and tools are developed to better engage societal stakeholders in policy-making processes. As for the institutionalization of the participation processes, one can observe three different trends:

- 1) countries that have developed a National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) as the main platform for participation processes: 15 countries out of 29 have institutionalized the participation process through an NCSD;
- 2) countries that use other platforms, such as ‘SD Dialogues’ or inter-ministerial strategy working group;
- 3) countries that are still developing some mechanisms: several countries have not yet established permanent platforms for participation of stakeholders;

In many countries, National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs) are under revision: the purpose is to make them more independent and less influenced by governments.

Consultation with stakeholders is felt to be useful during the review or revision processes of the NSDSs and that the results have provided direction in the further implementation of the NSDSs. Civil society seems to be more responsive in countries where NCSDs are very active. Therefore, these mechanisms play an important role in making the society aware of crucial SD issues. Consultation and participatory mechanisms (through councils or other bodies) display common functions:

- 1) Discussion forums;
- 2) Outreach and reporting mechanisms towards awareness raising and education activities;
- 3) Policy preparation, coordination and integration mechanism;
- 4) Critical reviewer;
- 5) Consensus finding and political guidance.

4.2 National Reform Programs (NRPs)

The National Reform Programmes¹⁴ (NRPs) are core documents provided by the European Member States for achieving the Europe 2020 targets. These reports translate the Europe 2020 targets into national targets and propose measures for achieving them (see [table on NRPs of all 27 EU Member States](#)).

¹⁴ A complete list of EU MS NRPs can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/tools/monitoring/recommendations_2011/index_en.htm

By the end of April 2011, all EU Member States drafted an NRP on the basis of the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines. *We analysed the NRPs of all 27 EU Member States based on their general structure (chapter level) and on information found in executive summaries.* We investigated inter alia the structure of the NRPs and the key measures to achieve the Europe 2020 targets. The analysis, which can be found in some detail below, reveals interesting results on a number of issues.

An overview of the national ministries which are responsible for the corresponding NRPs reveals a clear picture: In most Member States, for which the responsible institutions could be identified, Ministries of Finance and/or Ministries of Economy are responsible for the NRPs (DE, FI, NL, ES, IT, AT, GR, MT and SI) the. Some Member States have assigned responsibilities directly to their Government Offices or corresponding institutions (HU, PT, UK and FR). Furthermore, the NRPs vary substantially in length – from about 30 pages (e.g. Finland and Austria) to 160 (Italy).

Table: Europe 2020 EU headline targets¹⁵

EU wide headline targets				
Employment	R&D / innovation	Climate change / energy	Education	Poverty / social exclusion
75 %	3% of the EU's GDP	- GHG -20 % - RE 20% - Efficiency +20 %	- Early school leaving 10 % - Higher education 40 %	Risk of social exclusion: minus 20 mill persons

The EU Member States have been assigned different targets for the corresponding headline target areas of the Europe 2020 Strategy according to the burden-sharing principle and each individual Member State's capacity in order to achieve the Europe 2020 target collectively. The headline targets are shown in table above and vary considerably between Member States due to specific reasons mentioned before:

Employment:

Most of the Member States account for a target of around 75 % of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed, whereas exceptions for the higher end of the scale are Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark with 80 % respectively.

R&D / innovation:

The national targets for R&D investment (public and private combined as percentage of GDP) are characterized by huge differences across the Member States. While some Member States are requested to achieve investments in R&D of 1.5 % of GDP (e.g. Bulgaria, Poland, Italy), others countries targets account for an investment of about 4 % of GDP (e.g. Sweden).

Climate change / energy:

While the majority of Member States mention in their NRPs a GHG reduction target (compared to 1990 levels) between 15 and 20 %, others (e.g. Romania, Latvia and Bulgaria) are allowed to emit an additional amount of GHG ranging between 15 and 20 %.

¹⁵ A complete list of EU headline targets on EU MS level can be found here http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/targets_en.pdf

Whereas the overall EU target of renewable energy accounts for a share of 20 % (of EU energy consumption), the picture on the Member State level is rather diverse: Sweden, Finland and Latvia have to fulfil a target share at the higher end of the scale between 40 and 50 %, while, for example, the Netherlands, Belgium or the Czech Republic strive for a share between 10 and 15 %.

The target of energy efficiency increase accounts for an overall EU share of 20 % (equalling a total of 368 million tonnes of oil equivalent – mtoe), which varies considerably across Member States. Countries like Germany and France have reduction targets of around 35 mtoe, whereas Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece and Ireland share targets of around 3 mtoe.

Education:

Under the headline target “Education”, the EU’s overall objective is to reduce early school leaving (i.e. school drop-out rates) below 10 %. While some Member States like Italy and Spain are requested to achieve a reduction to about 15 %, others like Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia account for targets around 5 %.

In the area of tertiary education, the EU strives for a target of 40 % of the 30-34 year-olds completing third level education (or equivalent). Most of the Member States account for a target of between 30 to 40 %, whereas exceptions on the higher end of the scale are found in Ireland and France with a share of 60 and 50 % respectively.

Poverty / social exclusion:

In the context of poverty reduction and social exclusion the divergence of reduction targets on the Member States level is quite high. While the reduction targets of countries like the Netherlands, Finland and Latvia range between 100.000 and 150.000 persons, France, Spain and Poland account for reduction targets between 1.4 and 1.6 million persons.

According to the analysis of NRP chapters and of information included in the executive summaries, we found interesting results regarding the key measures for achieving the Europe 2020 targets. About two-thirds of MS have an increased emphasis on the economic aspects of (i) economic growth, (ii) employment and (iii) competitiveness. **The predominance of socio-economic issues within the NRPs is due to the fact that Integrated Guidelines for implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy on the EU Member States level mainly focus on employment and economic policies¹⁶.** In fact, 5 out of 10 guidelines can be explicitly linked to socio-economic aspects, which consequently affect the structure and focus of the corresponding NRPs. Apart from this issue, minor attention is given to the areas of social inclusion, energy and climate change as well as environmental protection.

As we have stated before, the NRPs mainly focus on socio-economic issues, however, interesting differences in terms of focal measures can be found among individual Member States. To illustrate this difference, we describe two opposite examples, namely

¹⁶ Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines,
http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMM_PDF_SEC_2010_0488_F_EN_RECOMMENDATION.pdf

Germany and Sweden. The key measures taken into account by the German NRP are mainly structured across socio-economic aspects to strengthen growth and employment. Germany includes the challenge of climate change and energy efficiency (e.g. enhancing funding for energy-efficient and climate friendly housing) to safeguard domestic demand as a basis for economic growth. On the other hand, the Swedish NRP more explicitly points to environmental, climate and energy challenges by specific resource, climate and energy policies (e.g. policies for sustainable resource use of maritime resources or technology strategies for waste management).

In conclusion, our analysis suggests that the overarching framework set out in the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines sets the direction of the NRP towards socio-economic aspects in order to stimulate economic growth and employment; however, some EU Member States explicitly include issues to deal with environmental, climate and energy issues.

5 Conclusions

This QR has the main aim to describe and analyse sustainable development governance and policies in the context of the major EU policy strategies, EU SDS and the Europe 2020 Strategy. It also includes aspects of SD governance as outlined in the preparatory documents of the Rio+20 conference. We present in this last chapter some conclusions drawn from the analysis above that should stimulate discussions on SD governance and policies in Europe:

- **Sustainable development and governance** are fundamentally linked. SD can be seen as a governance reform agenda that requires, most importantly, a long-term orientation of objectives; strong political commitment; a balancing of economic, environmental and social policies; provisions for cross-sectoral coordination of government departments; steering through multiple tiers of government; the inclusion of stakeholders; and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The ultimate goal is to create a policy cycle (from policy design, implementation, monitoring to feedback into the design of new/revised policies) and policy learning through feedback loops.
- The **EU SDS** of 2006 is the most overarching and cross-cutting EU policy strategy. It aims to balance economic, social and environmental policies and is oriented towards the long-term improvement of quality-of-life in Europe. However, the strategy – and specially its quantified objectives – are outdated and the governance process is weak: (a) reviews are done on a bi-annual basis only; (b) the link between the EU SDS and NSDSs is not strong enough – in fact, the Member States, when updating their NSDSs to make them in line with EU SDS objectives, are keener to create this link than the EU level; and (c) the commitment, especially on the EU level, to implement the EU SDS has decreased in recent years. It will be crucial for the future of the EU SDS how the Council decides in its meeting in December 2011 on the review of the strategy.
- The **Europe 2020 Strategy and its Flagship Initiatives** are the successor(s) of the Lisbon Strategy and aim to describe a path for Europe out of the (financial and economic) crisis. Although the Europe 2020 Strategy and its Flagships include – to varying degrees – sustainable development, their main orientation is towards economic growth and an increase in employment; environmental issues are included but generally serve an economic purpose. The governance of the Europe 2020 Strategy is streamlined (mostly top-down) and the EU objectives need to be translated into national reform programmes. What is more, the Europe 2020 governance process is strongly linked to the Stability and Growth Pact and thus to economic and financial policy-making. This seems to indicate that economic/financial issues prevail over sustainable development concerns.
- When looking at **how the key challenges of the EU SDS are addressed in the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives**, the picture is rather diverse. Although most key challenges are addressed, the quality of their inclusion needs to be looked at more comprehensively and carefully. From a first screening, it seems that the key challenges are not sufficiently addressed (especially “global poverty & SD

challenges”) and only the Resource-efficient Europe Flagship Initiative addresses the operational objectives of several key challenges more substantially.

- While approaching the UN Conference on SD (Rio+20), the preparation for the theme on “**institutional framework for SD**” has highlighted some interesting issues for SD governance in general, incl. the importance of NSDS at the national level (to improve cross-sectoral coordination and to develop a national approach for SD together with stakeholders); the success and importance of national SD councils; and anchoring of SD at sectoral ministries (“Green Ministers” are suggested for each government department).
- There is a lot of experience in the EU Member States (and, in fact, in other European countries) with regards to the development and implementation of **NSDSs**. Particularly in terms of horizontal and vertical integration, participation as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, NSDS processes reveal several interesting developments. However, in most countries NSDSs are not guiding policy strategies and their institutional anchoring in one ministry only (usually the Ministries of Environment) is not sufficient and rather weak.
- The new **National Reform Programmes (NRPs)** for the Europe 2020 Strategy have been adopted in the EU Member States in April 2011. The NRPs are based on the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines. Due to the fact that the Integrated Guidelines mainly focus on economic and employment policies, socio-economic issues predominate in the NRPs and SD issues seem to fall by the wayside. This can pose serious difficulties for advancing SD in Europe as well as in each EU Member State and sub-national level. If Europe 2020 has to be achieved through a concerted effort of all EU Member States, which is expressed by their National Reform Programs, it seems that with current NRPs, SD concerns will be side-lined. This calls for a stronger and updated EU SDS along with the Europe 2020 Strategy, and more influential NSDSs at the national level along with NRPs.

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