



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Rio+20: Pathways to a Sustainable Future - Council conclusions -

3152th ENVIRONMENT Council meeting

Brussels, 9 March 2012

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"CONVINCED that the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) offers a unique opportunity to secure renewed political commitment in order to move forward the sustainable development agenda in a comprehensive way also in respect of previous commitments and building on the Rio principles, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and BELIEVING that Rio+20 should inject significant impetus into the worldwide and just transition towards a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication,

STRESSING that the world is facing multiple crises and challenges that are mutually interlinked and that Rio+20 in this broader context provides a unique opportunity to rethink the current perception of growth and consumption, inclusion and how we utilize our limited resources, thereby safeguarding the needs of future generations,

UNDERSCORING a key answer to resolve these crises and challenges is enhanced resource efficiency as a core element in the transition to an inclusive, green economy within a significantly improved institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD) leading to higher environmental protection, sustainable energy for all and a low carbon transition, increased and sustainable productivity, green and decent jobs and poverty eradication to the benefit of human health and well-being, the environment and economic development,

STRESSING that sustainable development cannot be achieved without respecting and promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law, good governance, education, the role of youth and gender equality,

P R E S S

WELCOMING the zero draft of the outcome document "The Future We Want" as a good basis for further negotiations and UNDERLINING our determination to work for a focused and forward-looking political declaration from the Conference that should set out a shared vision for change, as well as goals and actions at international level to be achieved within agreed time frames,

RECALLING the Council conclusions of 10 October 2011 on Rio+20¹, the Council conclusions of 15 December 2011 on a Roadmap to a Resource-Efficient Europe², the joint contribution by the EU and its Member States submitted to UN DESA by 1 November 2011³ and the European Council Conclusions of 1-2 March 2012⁴,

UNDERLINING the overarching challenge of climate change and RECALLING the Council Conclusions of 9 March 2012 on the follow-up to the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 7th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 7) (Durban, South Africa, 28 November - 9 December 2011)⁵,

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. REAFFIRMS the European Union and its Member States' commitment to play an active and constructive role in the ongoing negotiations with a view to contributing to an ambitious outcome of the Conference including concrete and timely follow-up actions and WILL CONTINUE to be closely engaged in the developments of the negotiations in the run up to the Rio+20 Conference in June 2012 and to further develop its views in that light, as appropriate;
2. REAFFIRMS its support to an open and inclusive process allowing the full and active participation of all relevant stakeholders during the negotiations and at the Conference itself, and UNDERLINES the importance of a strong involvement of local governments, the private sector, trade unions and civil society as a whole in the follow-up of Rio+20 and the implementation of the commitments made;
3. RECOGNIZES that population dynamics are strongly and inseparably linked to our efforts to promote sustainable development and protect the environment as well as to further improve human well-being, reduce poverty and hunger, promote decent employment and ensure food, water and energy security, which require higher economic performance and EMPHASIZES that population dynamics need to be addressed through human rights based policies;
4. STRESSES the importance of gender equality and the vital role that women's equal economic and political participation has for achieving sustainable development and UNDERLINES that education is essential to build skills and competences;
5. ACKNOWLEDGES the alarming trends of natural and man-made disasters and the detrimental impacts on sustainable development and EMPHASIZES the need to address in an integrated manner all stages of disaster management;

¹ Doc. 15388/11.

² Doc. 18346/11.

³ Doc. 15841/11.

⁴ Doc. EUCO 4/12

⁵ Doc. 7517/12

6. WELCOMES the report of the UNSG High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability as well as the UNSG Sustainable Energy for All initiative as valuable inputs to the Rio+20 outcome;
7. WELCOMES the number of important meetings that are taking place in different fora in the run-up to Rio+20 as useful inputs to the Conference outcome, such as the Sixth World Water Forum;

Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication (GESDPE)

8. CONSIDERS an inclusive, green economy as a means to achieve sustainable development globally; UNDERLINES that greening the economy is essential to promote long term equitable growth, green and decent jobs, resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production, human health and well being and hence eradicate poverty, providing benefits for all citizens and offering win-win opportunities to all countries, regardless of the structure of their economy and their level of development; EMPHASIZES that an inclusive, green economy offers an opportunity to create a positive, inspiring new global model of growth that not only reverses negative, environmental trends but drives future development and job creation; and RECOGNISES in this context the need to consider the concept of the "blue economy", which extends the principles of the green economy *inter alia* to the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources;
9. REITERATES that one of the main operational outcomes of Rio+20 should be the adoption of a green economy roadmap with timetables for specific goals, objectives and actions at the international level as a significant contribution to sustainable development, with emphasis on poverty eradication;
10. SUPPORTS the establishment of a Capacity Development Scheme including an international knowledge sharing platform, based on and making better use of existing initiatives such as the Green Growth Knowledge Platform in order to facilitate and provide country specific and where appropriate region and sector-specific advice to all interested countries regarding the transition to a green economy based on the principle of ownership and national differences;
11. RECOGNIZES that climate change, loss of biodiversity and land degradation as well as water scarcity are serious threats to human societies, ecosystems and peace and stability and therefore WELCOMES
 - the outcome of global negotiations on climate at the Durban Conference, which needs to be urgently followed up to operationalise the objective of staying below 2°C through a decision on a time frame for peaking of global emissions and a global emission reduction goal,
 - the results on biodiversity at the Nagoya Conference, including the agreed Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for the period 2011-2020, its associated targets and the Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing,
 - the results on desertification at the Changwon Conference which provide a global policy and monitoring framework and promote partnerships for the safeguard of soil resources;
12. UNDERLINES that, although these negotiations remain separate processes, Rio+20 should build on and promote potential synergies with these complementary and mutually reinforcing processes;

13. NOTES that the increasing demand for natural resources makes action on decoupling resource use from economic growth, as well as innovation, a key element towards a more sustainable global, green economy and STRESSES the importance of promoting the valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services and the integration of these valuations into policies, decision-making and economic processes;
14. RECALLS that gross domestic product (GDP) is mostly a measure of production and does not reflect issues such as environmental sustainability, the use of natural and human capital, resource efficiency and social inclusion and STRESSES the need to use, and where necessary develop and agree on, indicators that complement GDP and contribute to a more accurate picture of the inter-linkages between the environmental, economic and social aspects of wealth, welfare and well-being;
15. CALLS FOR the adoption, at the Rio+20 Conference, of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on sustainable consumption and production as elaborated at the nineteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD);

Framework for action and follow-up

16. HIGHLIGHTS that GESDPE and the green economy roadmap are closely linked to the priority issues in the *Framework for action and follow-up* of the zero draft in terms of promoting and further developing concrete actions in specific sectors; WELCOMES progress on initiatives outlined in the zero draft as building blocks for decisions at the Rio+20 Conference, and CALLS for more ambitious policies and actions at the international level as well as at national, regional and local levels than those currently reflected in the zero draft;
17. INVITES the Commission, based on the Conclusions of the European Council of 1-2 March 2012, as a matter of urgency to present proposals for clear operational targets and concrete actions with agreed timeframes in areas directly related to the transition towards an inclusive green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, such as sustainable energy, water, sustainable land management and ecosystems, oceans and resource efficiency, in particular waste, to be proposed by the EU and its Member States in the Rio negotiations with a view to an ambitious and focused outcome;
18. IS COMMITTED to negotiate with international partners to ensure an ambitious, action oriented outcome of the conference for all issues regarding the framework for action and follow up drawing from the EU and its Member States' submission to UN DESA on 1 November 2011, including the above mentioned areas as well as food, nutrition, sustainable agriculture, fisheries, forestry, sustainable cities and chemicals, as well as in areas related to the sustainable management and restoration of natural resources;

Institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD)

19. UNDERSCORES that the IFSD in all three dimensions of sustainable development needs to be reformed, strengthened, better coordinated and made more coherent at global, regional, national, sub-national and local level and RECOGNISES that the current IFSD arrangements are not effectively responding to the challenges before us;

20. CALLS FOR an institutional architecture that achieves the main objective of putting in place a strong global governance structure for sustainable development that also addresses the shortcomings of the current system and EMPHASIZES that a strengthened IFSD needs to provide for political leadership, including at the highest levels, coherence and coordination, stronger science policy interface, effectiveness and efficiency in implementation, progress monitoring and review, transparency, accountability as well as wider participation and effective association of major groups and non-state actors, starting already in the reform process;
21. HOLDS that IFSD reforms should be decided on the basis of a clear identification of the specific functions required and should take into account financial, structural and legal implications; UNDERLINES that reforms should promote synergies between existing processes, seek to avoid duplication, eliminate unnecessary overlaps, maximize effective use of financial resources and reduce administrative burdens and build on existing arrangements; and CONFIRMS its readiness to engage in discussions on significant structural reform options;
22. REITERATES its strong resolve to strengthen the environmental dimension of the IFSD and in this regard to upgrade UNEP into a specialized UN agency for the environment based in Nairobi with a revised and strengthened mandate and universal membership, supported by stable, adequate and predictable financial contributions and operating on an equal footing with other UN specialized agencies; CALLS FOR Rio+20 to decide on the process for taking forward the reform option agreed, including timeframes; and STRESSES the need for further efforts to enhance synergies between the Multilateral Environmental Agreements;
23. RESOLVES to promote enhanced access to information, public participation in decision making and access to justice in environmental matters, including by considering legally binding frameworks at the most appropriate level;

Sustainable development goals (SDGs)

24. WELCOMES the proposals on SDGs as a valuable contribution to Rio+20 that could contribute to a more focused and coherent action towards sustainable development; EMPHASIZES that SDGs as well as an inclusive GESDPE and an enhanced IFSD could be important elements for progress; taken together, they would encompass goals as well as means, increasing the potential for truly changing the pathways towards sustainable development;
25. CONSIDERS that any such goals should fully encompass all three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced and synergistic way; be universal, while taking into account the need to apply different approaches in different countries in the efforts to achieve them; be limited in number; be linked to possible concrete targets and indicators and easily communicable; CONFIRMS that the EU and its Member States are ready to engage in discussions on such goals;
26. CONSIDERS that work on SDGs should be coordinated and coherent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) review process, without deviating efforts from the achievement of the MDGs by 2015; further CONSIDERS that it would be important to have an overarching framework for post 2015 that encompasses the three dimensions of sustainable development with goals that address key challenges in a holistic and coherent way to ensure the optimal mix of measures for attaining lasting solutions;

Means of implementation

27. STRESSES the importance of adequate means of implementation for the goals and actions to be agreed at Rio+20; HIGHLIGHTS that funding for the implementation of sustainable development policies and actions will have to come from a variety of sources, both public and private;
28. CALLS for a more effective use of existing resources, as well as the mobilization of available sources of finance as well as identification of innovative sources. In light of the economic situation, UNDERSCORES that mobilization of funding must be undertaken in a way that is consistent with the objectives of global economic recovery and further UNDERLINES the important role of International Financial Institutions and the Global Environment Facility as important sources of finance, advice and capacity building for sustainable development;
29. NOTES that a number of emerging economies are becoming key partners of developing countries and RECOGNISES the role of South-South and triangular cooperation as highlighted in the outcome document of the 4th High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan;
30. UNDERSCORES the importance of the private sector and of partnerships between the private and the public sector in promoting investment, trade and innovation, including in delivering a global GESDPE and REAFFIRMS the need to implement worldwide sound corporate governance as well as international principles and standards on corporate social responsibility; STRESSES that governments should make better use of the business sector's expertise, resources and innovative power; and RESOLVES to actively remove major barriers that hinder investments and market potential for the transition to a green economy;
31. HIGHLIGHTS the importance, in a green economy, of prices that reflect actual environmental and social costs as well as the gradual elimination of environmentally harmful subsidies that are incompatible with sustainable development, and CONSIDERS that a gradual removal of these subsidies would help market prices to better reflect those costs and contribute to a more open and non-discriminatory trading system;
32. STRESSES the need for improved access, reduced costs and enhanced participation in green trade by facilitating trade in environmentally friendly goods, technologies and services, through the reduction or elimination of tariffs and efforts to remove or overcome non-tariff barriers and by enhanced active participation by developing countries in international standardization processes, inter alia through capacity building and technical assistance;
33. UNDERLINES the important role played by cooperation on technology, research and innovation, education and training programmes and EMPHASISES the need to improve mechanisms for international research cooperation and for the development of information and communications technology on major sustainable development challenges;
34. STRESSES also the importance of regulation as part of the toolbox for a conducive environment for green investments as well as sustainable procurement and for discouraging production practices that are resource inefficient and damaging to the environment and human health, thereby also promoting decent and green jobs;

35. RECOGNISES the continuing relevance of Official Development Assistance (ODA) as an important source of finance for development particularly in the least developed countries (LDCs) and as a catalyst for leveraging funding from other sources, including through triangular cooperation; REAFFIRMS the commitment of the EU and its Member States to achieve their collective ODA target by 2015; ENCOURAGES all other traditional and emerging donors to contribute to the global development efforts in accordance with evolving realities and STRESSES the need to further improve aid and development effectiveness in line with the principles and commitments of the Rome/Paris/Accra/Busan agenda."
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