



Belgian Federal Council for Sustainable Development

The ten priorities of the Advice on the *Preliminary draft of the federal sustainable development plan 2000-2003*

- Requested by the Interdepartmental Commission on Sustainable Development
- Prepared by the Councils' working groups
- Endorsed by the General Assembly of April 4, 2000

- [1] Under the law of May 5, 1997, regarding the co-ordination of sustainable development policy the Belgian federal government must draft a sustainable development plan once every four years. The preliminary draft of the first plan, covering the period from 2000 to 2003, was unveiled on 11 January 2000. The preliminary draft plan is a document generated by administrative authorities; it is not yet a government document. The Belgian Federal Council for Sustainable Development FRDO-CFDD (the acronym comes from the Dutch *Federale Raad voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling* and the French *Conseil Fédéral du Développement Durable*) is required to issue an advice on the preliminary draft plan within 90 days.
- [2] The FRDO-CFDD has evaluated the *Preliminary draft of the federal sustainable development plan 2000-2003*. If the objectives of the preliminary draft plan are achieved, it would constitute an important step towards sustainable development. The Council also salutes the efforts of the officials who prepared the document. In its advice, the Council first gives a general assessment of the preliminary draft plan. It then issues specific observations.
- [3] The following ten points constitute the priorities of the advice from the FRDO-CFDD.
- i) In the advice of the Council, the objectives of the preliminary draft plan are not specific and/or ambitious enough in some cases. The Council emphasises that the objectives that Belgium wants to achieve during the period covered by the plan should be described more clearly and as specifically as possible in the plan. Belgium's commitments at European and international level must constitute a starting point in this respect.
 - ii) The Council observes that the preliminary draft of the plan does not address the consequences of the plan for the budget or staffing. This is a very serious omission. The Council hopes that the plan will indicate very clearly the quantity and nature of the resources necessary to realise the plan's objectives. The plan may not give rise to an increase in the public debt or in overall tax or parafiscal pressure. In the Council's view, the plan must examine changes within the framework of the budget or staffing as well as alternative funding possibilities.
 - iii) The preliminary draft plan continuously and rightly stresses that the economic, social and environmental aspects of problems must be addressed in an integrated manner. The Council draws attention to the fact that a balance among these three aspects must be achieved. This might furthermore indicate that, in the environmental and social areas, which are the weakest elements in this balance, measures to correct the situation may prove necessary. The Council's position is that prices must take social and environmental costs into account.



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- iv) A sustainable energy policy is an essential condition for sustainable development, in the Council's advice. The context of the Kyoto Protocol and the option of abandoning nuclear energy for the production of electricity will require a structural reduction of the demand for energy. Developing renewable energy sources are necessary, but will not be sufficient. Our modes of production and consumption of energy must be called into question. The Council recommends making the structural development of rational use of energy the highest priority.
 - v) In the Council's view, it is logical for the federal level to play a central role within the framework of a preliminary draft federal plan, but the document should make more frequent reference to other political levels, while naturally respecting the jurisdictions of these levels. This principle also applies as concerns the European and international levels, as well as those of the Regions and Communities.
 - vi) The preliminary draft plan is often not detailed enough as concerns the actors responsible for its implementation. The Council requests that the plan systematise this data into summary tables. To this end, the plan must consider not only administrative departments and co-operation among various departments and levels of power, but also the role of the Parliament and major bodies of civil society.
 - vii) The Council is further of the opinion that the plan must also include a timetable for its implementation. It is therefore necessary to provide for intermediate assessments and possible adjustments. Sustainable development indicators also play an important role in monitoring the development of the plan.
 - viii) The Council emphasises that sustainable development cannot occur unless the public is actively involved. The Council expects the plan to focus more on this aspect than the preliminary draft plan did. Major information and awareness-raising campaigns must be integrated into a policy of sustainable development. The Council also requests that the text of the plan be more accessible than that of the preliminary draft. The Council notes that the lack of time constitutes a major problem in this respect.
 - ix) The preliminary draft plan indicates that poverty is a threat to the future of society. The Council therefore asks that care be taken to ensure that measures taken under the plan are not detrimental to the poor(est). The Council observes that employment is the best means of fighting poverty and social exclusion. The social security system must furthermore be provided with the necessary resources.
 - x) The Council notes that the preliminary draft plan examines most themes only from a Belgian or European perspective, and not from a global viewpoint. The Council maintains that the plan must take systematic account of the global dimension. As concerns international trade and development co-operation, the Council stresses that the plan must aim for coherency between the two as one of the main thrusts of sustainable development.
- [4] The Council is of the opinion that the achievement of the objectives of the preliminary draft plan will constitute an important step towards sustainable development. The first federal plan for sustainable development must initiate a long process of profound change in modes of production and consumption leading to sustainable development.