

Workshop Summary

Integrating Environmental Concerns into the General Affairs Council

Best Practice in Integrating Environment into Foreign Affairs

**Report to the European Commission
Directorate-General Environment**

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More information on the workshop “Integrating Environmental Concerns into the General Affairs Council - Best Practice in Integrating the Environment into Foreign Affairs” can be found at <http://www.ecologic.de/english/download/index.html>, clicking the folder for the workshop, or directly at http://www.ieep.de/download/index_905.html.

From time to time, information relating to upcoming events will be placed on that site.

1 The Context

Article 6 of the EC Treaty stipulates that environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the definition and implementation of the Community policies and activities with a view to promoting sustainable development¹. The European Council at Cardiff (June 1998) invited all relevant formations of the Council to establish their own strategies for giving effect to environmental integration and sustainable development within their respective policy areas. The European Council at Cologne (June 1999) called upon the General Affairs Council (GAC) to report back to it on its strategy for integration.

In order to meet the requirements of the Cardiff process, the GAC is to submit to the European Council meeting in Barcelona in spring 2002 its strategy for integrating environmental protection requirements into the policies in its remit. The strategy will mainly focus on external relations, and not deal with horizontal and institutional issues. Development Co-operation is the subject of a separate Cardiff Strategy developed by the Development Council. The forthcoming GAC External Cardiff Strategy constitutes input to the appropriate sections of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. This in turn will be an EU contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in the autumn of 2002.

To prepare the GAC External Cardiff Strategy, the European Commission, led by DG Relex, was asked to submit a Communication on integrating the environment into external relations. The Workshop "Integrating Environmental Concerns into the GAC - Best Practice on Integrating the Environment into Foreign Affairs" on 28 September 2001 in Brussels brought together 38 participants. These included representatives and officials from the European Parliament, the European Commission (Secretariat General, DG Environment, DG Relex), the Presidency of the European Union, and six Member States² (Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Environment, Permanent Representations) as well as non-governmental think tanks. Possible elements for the Commission Communication and the GAC External Cardiff Strategy were discussed, with reference *inter alia* to the Cardiff Strategies of other Council configurations and the experience gained in implementing them so far.

In addition, Member States presented cases of best practice in integrating environmental requirements into the activities and procedures of ministries of foreign affairs. However, many Member States do not have much experience in integrating environment into external relations and the EU, though the Cardiff Process appears to be stimulating developments in the Member States.

¹ See Report to the European Council on environmental integration in the external policies within the remit of the General Affairs Council [Council document 7791/01+cor1].

² There were Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

2 Objectives of the Commission Communication

The overall challenge for the European Commission is to provide for the integration of environmental concerns into the Community's dialogues with all third countries and covering the environment in country or regional strategy papers.

The coherence of policies and their effectiveness are two paramount principles in environmental policy integration. The GAC suggested three focal areas for the Commission Communication on integrating the environment into external relations:

- Cross-cutting issues in external policy;
- Multilateral Co-operation and international governance;
- International trade.

In addition, the Commission needs to reflect on ways to combine existing documents on trade policy and on external relations. Measures included in the GAC External Cardiff Strategy need to be realistic, and their practical implementation should be considered. In this context, it is essential to win the commitment of the Member States.

The elaboration of Cardiff Strategies for environmental policy integration is a horizontal or cross-cutting process, which stands in contrast to the EU's sectoral orientation and the structure of sectoral Council configurations. The EU does not always have the means for addressing horizontal issues and pursuing cross-cutting policies. In particular, environmental policy integration requires the establishment of specific networks of officials, which is a non-political or "bureaucratic" activity currently without a basis in the structures underpinning the work of the GAC.

On the whole, the GAC External Cardiff Strategy should ensure the complementarity of policies, be they sectoral and driven by different Council configurations, or be they a responsibility of different scales of government such as the EU and the Member States. This requires a constant effort to ensure co-ordination among the relevant actors. In addition, policies should be consistent with one another and over time.

3 Challenges

The development of the GAC External Cardiff Strategy faces a number of challenges, some of the specific to external policies:

- The scope of the GAC is exceptionally wide. In addition to the horizontal and institutional issues not considered here, the GAC addresses *inter alia* trade, development, and enlargement, which results in some overlap with other Council configurations.
- The nature of external relations is not always suited to the articulation of clear aims and often consists of political statements.

- The GAC is often reactive in its work as it responds to emerging developments, which limits the possibilities for strategy formulation.
- Targets in the field of external relations are difficult to quantify, which hinders the development of appropriate indicators.
- Goal attainment is rarely possible by the actions of one international player alone, even if the activities of the EU and all Member States are fully co-ordinated. There is currently no satisfactory global structure for international environmental governance.
- The policy communities for external relations and for environment policy have different views on integrating the environment into external relations, are characterised by distinct cultures and use different language and terminology. Foreign ministries appear to be lacking in staff with experience in environmental issues.
- Lack of sufficient financial resources is often preventing environmental issues from being included in negotiations with third countries.
- External relations of the EU need to be co-ordinated with the Member States, which retain core responsibilities and competencies in this field, and neither the Commission nor the Council could prescribe a strategy.

During the workshop a number of thematic issues were highlighted which would need to be addressed in the GAC External Cardiff Strategy but transcend the remit of the GAC alone. These include controlling population growth and the reduction of poverty with its attendant effects on the protection and sustainable management of natural resources, the transfer of unsustainable production and consumption patters to developing countries. A particular challenge is the reform of unsustainable EU policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Commercial Policy, which both are of high salience for external relations.

4 Elements for the GAC External Cardiff Strategy

The participants of the workshop found that the GAC External Cardiff Strategy should include a Plan of Action, which is divided into several sections containing detailed objectives and activities. A follow-up process, which may involve the creation of an appropriate forum, should stimulate the further development and refinement of the strategy. A review of the strategy is foreseen in 2003 providing the opportunity to incorporate the outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Refinement should include the identification of indicators and the setting of specified targets and objectives. The possible content of the strategy, possible tools, instruments and principles as well as possible actions, which were raised during the seminar are as follows.

4.1 Content

The strategy should address *inter alia* the EU internal reform and its coherence with the reform of external policies. The objective would be to ensure that the emerging structures for international environmental governance are compatible with the EU's internal structures and procedures. In this way, environmental policy integration should be facilitated with respect to the World Trade Organization and the current round of World trade negotiations – for instance by conducting Sustainability Impact Assessments of trade agreements – and with respect to the co-ordination (or “clustering”) of Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Other items for consideration would include the understanding of the life support function of the natural environment and the consequences of environmental degradation for cultural identity, internal tensions and dislocation, migration and conflict (“disaster prevention”). Another such item would be the importance of fighting corruption and environmental crime including the development of (domestic) governance structures allowing for transparency and participation in all countries.

The strategy would need to combine different time horizons (short, medium, and long term), geographical scales (countries, regional groupings), and levels of action (bilateral, multilateral). Themes to be addressed would include water, land and forests, marine, urban environment, energy, poverty, and the need to manage the environment as a global common good. Equally important themes would be cross-cutting issues such as institutional capacity building – in the areas of policy formulation, legislation and administrative implementation – and the strengthening of civil society and in particular environmental and conservation NGOs.

4.2 Possible Tools, instruments and principles

In general terms, the following principles and instruments should be included in the GAC External Cardiff Strategy for environmental policy integration:

- All principles of EU environmental policy and notably the Precautionary Principle;
- Sustainability Impact Assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessment of agreements, policies and programmes, and projects and measures;
- Detailed environmental analyses in Country Strategies and regional strategies;
- Awareness raising and training in third countries;
- Donor co-ordination;
- Integrate the environment into external relations policy tools: Negotiations, delegations and agenda setting.

4.3 Experiences reported

Presentations and comments from the Member States during the workshop highlighted the need for training of own and third country's staff. This could include internal information procedures, creating networks of environmental desk officers including

contact persons in scientific institutions ("help desks"), or the setting up of structures and procedures for institutionalising environmental policy integration. Support for the development and implementation of national environment policy plans or national environment actions plans is particularly important, and should incorporate the principle of integrating environmental concerns into other policies.

A particular challenge appears to be the balancing of environmental and other issues, particularly at times when other issues become short-term urgencies. Currently, there are large unspent amounts of money for development co-operation. At the same time, there is a clear need to enable developing countries to participate in the negotiations of multilateral environmental agreements and to build capacities for implementing them. Co-ordination among the EU and Member States, and individual donor agencies, would be an important contribution to overcoming the various bottlenecks presently hampering development and environmental policies.

Some foreign policy tools may make noticeable contributions to furthering environmental objectives in foreign relations and international affairs. Examples would be the acquired negotiation skills and understanding of regime development, knowledge of institutions and processes, disciplines and co-ordination within and among delegations, and experience and leverage in agenda setting.

4.4 Possible Actions

The workshop participants agreed that areas for priority action during an initial phase in the implementation of the GAC External Cardiff Strategy should be identified and defined.

- One area would be the reform of the international trade regime in the current negotiations and the interface between WTO rules and those contained in multi-lateral environmental agreements.
- Another would be the reform of rules and procedures in export credit agencies and (global and regional) international financial institutions and in particular the development banks.
- A priority for external relations could be support for enhanced regional co-operation over the protection and management of natural resources such as the joint management of the Nile river basin.
- Another practical measure would be the establishment of environmental management systems in all institutions engaged in external relations, aiming for EMAS certification. Such systems would need to address the "products" of external policies.
- The integration of environmental concerns in the Union's external relations is to be part of future "orientation debates" for discussing ways and means of better co-ordinating the external dimension of the policies of the Union and how a more efficient disbursement of financial assistance can be achieved.
- There is a need to achieve complementarity, co-ordination and consistency among policies and levels, processes and instruments.

- Governance reform should be promoted to achieve better integration of environment in the policies and actions of international institutions. One necessary condition for this is strengthened international environmental governance.
- Issues for specific focus included:
 - Environment and Security: need for including environment and natural resources as part of conflict prevention policies.
 - Poverty and the Environment: need to understand linkages better and develop policy options that reduce poverty through protection of the environment.
 - Energy: need to develop sustainable energy policies driving energy efficiency and promoting renewable energy sources.
 - Water: need for promoting the protection and management of international (shared) water resources for building mutual trust and prevent conflicts.
 - Land: need for promoting the protection and sustainable management of land and soil resources thus enhancing the ecological carrying capacity of ecosystems.
- The following measures for implementation were suggested:
 - Better use of Commission Delegations and Member States' Embassies, High Commission etc; co-ordination among environment attachés.
 - Participation of officials from environment units of foreign affairs ministries in delegations for international negotiations on the environment; making use of the whole "machinery" of foreign relations to promote EU positions.
 - Development of targets and indicators for integration of environment in external relations (compare World Bank).
 - Specific training in skills associated with foreign affairs for officials dealing with international issues in ministries of environment.
 - Strengthening of staff resources, both in foreign and environment ministries and the respective Commission services.
- The following future steps were identified:
 - The workshop discussed the positive experience of the seminar held in London between environmental officials in foreign ministries and welcomed Finland's intention to organise a similar seminar in the months to come.
 - A "Road Map" charting follow-up from the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council meeting in Göteborg relating to the Sustainable Development Strategy is being developed for adoption towards the end of 2001.
 - Before the end of 2001, the General Affairs Council is to endorse a set of environment-related indicators adopted by the Environment Council.
 - The Belgian Presidency proposes to set up a "Senior Officials Working Group on Environment-related Aspects of the Sustainable Development Strategy", which is to play a similar function to that of the Economic Policy Committee.