

**The EU as a global actor –
Education for Sustainable Development**

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union today consists of 27 Member States, representing about 500 million people. It is the largest trading power on earth and the biggest donor of overseas development aid to developing countries.

The increased size of the European Union has given the EU more weight internationally, not just in the economic field- where the EU increasingly is setting standards- but also in other fields. For example, the European Union has taken upon itself the ambitious task of being a global leader in the fight against climate change. We are committed to reducing our carbon emissions by 20 % by 2020, and we are ready to go to 30 %, if there is a global agreement with a fair sharing of the burden.

Combating climate change is a key priority for the Swedish Presidency. A number of meetings have already taken place. Many countries have so far been reluctant to show all their cards. But as we come closer to the Copenhagen meeting I am confident that we will see a greater willingness to really get into the negotiations and work out agreements. We cannot afford a failure in Copenhagen in December. Climate change is mankind's largest challenge and we have to face it wisely and courageously.

Another priority for our Presidency is to stabilise the economy, to implement the EU recovery plan, to draw up new rules for better supervision of the financial markets, as well actions to mitigate increased unemployment.

The current economic crisis is exceptionally severe. We cannot close our eyes and pretend this is not a problem. But it is nevertheless crucial that the economic downturn is not used as an excuse to lower ambitions in the field of environment. Our economic recovery should be carried out in a way that leads the world onto a sustainable economic path. With wise policy choices we can kill two birds with one stone. A green economy requires new technology and this also implies new jobs and new export markets.

The strong growth that businesses in new technologies have experienced over the last years shows the potential of the green economy, for example in the areas of renewable energy and energy efficiency. It is interesting to note that the European Commission in a report calculates that by 2050 the market for new energy technology may be worth 3 000 billion USD and employ some 25 million people.

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The EU will adopt a new Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs next spring, but already during the Swedish Presidency we will start discussions and draw some conclusions that will frame the new strategy. The focus will be on how the policy agendas on climate change, energy and energy-efficiency, innovation and competitiveness can create synergies and ensure economic growth and sustainability.

I am convinced that the double challenge of fighting climate change and the economic crisis inevitably will lead to structural changes in our societies and encourage us to be more climate-smart and resource-efficient. And I would like to underline that it is perfectly possible to grow economically while at the same reducing emissions. This country, for example, has cut carbon emission by a tenth since 1990, while the economy grew by 50 %.

For the new Lisbon strategy the Swedish government highlights investment in human capital and research. High-quality education systems, with few dropouts, opportunities for those who lack adequate qualifications, and an infrastructure for continuous education and training are essential in providing the labour market with necessary skills and competencies. But above all education is a means to strengthen the individual and his and her ability to adapt to a changing world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of this Conference is Education for Sustainable Development. Let me briefly recapitulate the history of sustainable development.

Already in 1987 – 22 years ago! – the Brundtland Report, also known as ‘Our Common Future’ alerted the world to the urgency of making progress towards economic development that could be sustained without depleting natural resources or harming the environment. The report provided a key statement on sustainable development, defining it as: "development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

I could also express it in another way: ‘We must confront the crisis, but it must do so in a sustainable way. We must not let today’s solutions become tomorrow’s problems’.

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In 2001, under the first Swedish Presidency, the EU adopted the first EU strategy for sustainable development. It was then complemented the year after with a global dimension. In 2006 a new EU sustainable development strategy was adopted. It has seven priority areas:

1. climate change and clean energy,
2. sustainable transport,
3. sustainable consumption and production,

4. conservation and management of natural resources,
5. public health,
6. social inclusion, demography and migration
7. global poverty.

In addition it has some crosscutting issues, of which education and training and research and development deserve to be mentioned here.

We should also recall that sustainable development is written into the EU Treaty as an over-arching and long-term goal for EU.

In the 2006 strategy it is said that the European Council shall review progress every second year based on a Communication from the European Commission.

The Commission recently adopted its latest progress report. This will be the basis for the deliberations among EU Member States under the Swedish Presidency. We will also take account of another document, which soon will be released, namely the bi-annual report from the EU Statistical office, Eurostat. It will present a number of sustainable development indicators, which will give us a better picture of where developments are going.

The Commission notes that progress is being made in all seven priority areas. But, there are four areas where it considers that development at present is clearly unsustainable. These areas are energy consumption in the transport sector, overuse of natural resources, a continuous decline of biodiversity and efforts to combat global poverty.

On 'education' the Commission gives a mixed verdict. On one hand, the prevalence of 'low education' has diminished in all age groups. More people are involved in life-long learning activities and we have fewer early school-leavers. But improvements are not happening fast enough to meet targets.

The concept of sustainable development covers many different policy areas. It is important to bear in mind that this Strategy is about the linking of environmental, social and economic policies. The Strategy recognises the important role that education, training and research play as crosscutting areas. That means that we must take account of many different viewpoints in our work. During the forthcoming months we intend to make efforts to involve stakeholders in consultations and discussions. Your conclusions from this meeting will indeed be valuable to us in our SDS review task.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The EU has identified eight key competencies that each citizen will need, to adapt successfully to new challenges in this rapidly changing world. They are competencies linked to education for sustainable development, for example language skills; competencies in mathematics, science and technology; as well as digital competence. Half of the eight key competencies may actually be an outcome of Education for Sustainable Development, such as learning to learn, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, social and civic competencies, as well as cultural awareness and expression.

I also want to mention the role of research and development. We need research that supports both short-term decisions and long-term visionary concepts that tackle problems of a global and regional nature. Technology for smart growth is another area where much remains to be done. Research is necessary to develop successful methods of teaching and learning for sustainable development, in different settings and for different learners. I'd like to stress that we can learn a lot from each other- and not just from public education producers, but also from industry, which for years has developed methods to improve learning within companies.

(Research needs to promote inter- and trans- disciplinary approaches and bridge the gap between science, policy-making and implementation. I would say: We need innovation in order to become more sustainable as a society.)

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The United Nations Economic Council for Europe (UNECE) gathers some 60 countries in Europe and North America around a vision of a region characterised by sustainable development, so as to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Its strategy for education for sustainable development, adopted in 2006, is in our view another reference point for the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development. We can learn from UNECE's work with indicators.

When it comes to options for the future I'd like to highlight the added value of the EU-SDS. We should discuss how the EU SDS can contribute to structural change and help our societies move towards low-carbon and resource-efficient economies.

To better take into account the long-term perspective of the SDS it is important to measure the development. We have been working with sustainable indicators for many years, but it is proven to be both technically difficult and politically sensitive. In this context I would like to mention another European Commission Communication that has just been released, 'Beyond GDP'. It is an attempt to develop additional data on development, and not just look at economic and monetary aspects. The purpose is to get a better reflection of total development that also includes social and environmental parameters. Well-being for people is more than what can be measured in economic terms.

Of course, let me clarify that in general terms, I find that high economic growth is preferable to low or negative economic growth, but we should be aware that the

GDP is a crude measure. It does not include changes in what we call Human and Natural Capital. And it does not measure quality of life, or happiness.

In this context I find it suitable to quote Albert Einstein who said: 'Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count, and everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted'!

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Finally, ladies and gentlemen, a few remarks on the links between the Lisbon Strategy and the SDS. They complement each other and are to a certain extent overlapping. Focus in the two strategies is different. The Lisbon strategy mainly focuses on employment, economic growth and Europe's competitiveness within the next 5-10 years. The SDS is about long-term development trends and solidarity between generations. The global dimension is also prominent.

We should concentrate on the added value of the Sustainable Development Strategy. I would like to stress the long-term goal, because despite good progress today in some areas much remains to be done for the future. Let us take the opportunity to think about not just the follow-up that we are going to undertake during the Swedish Presidency, but to think even more ahead and see how we can take the Sustainable Development Strategy into the future.

Citizens want us to respond to the challenges of today and at the same time prepare for the future, to improve the quality of life both for current and future generations. We have to get out of the current double economic and environmental crisis, creating jobs. The cost of inaction is far higher than the cost of action.

In the longer run our goal should be to get sustainable thinking into all relevant policy areas and make a specialised SDS superfluous! This will require quite some efforts. It also means that we will have to ensure consistency and make

sure for example that our fisheries policy does not make life unsustainable for people in, let's say, Western Africa.

Maybe we should also ask ourselves if it makes sense to subsidise tobacco growing, and at the same time pay for anti-smoking campaigns? Is our common agricultural policy sustainable in the long run, including for people in the third world?

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Sustainable development involves a profound transformation of societies. Therefore, existing knowledge must be structured in a relevant way and new knowledge must be developed. Knowledge must be widely shared in order to increase awareness and to provide a basis for decision-making. This is all a large societal learning process. Consequently, there is a need for education as well as for reshaping education.

Thank you for your attention, and let me wish you all success with your conference!