

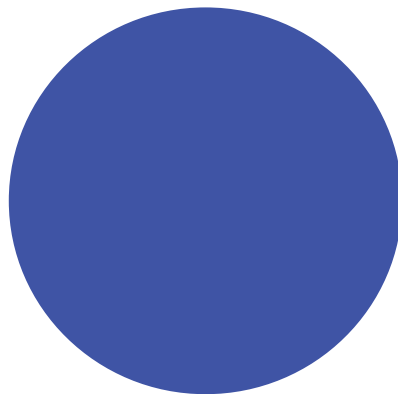
FEDERAL PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2000-2004



Adopted by the Federal Government of Belgium on 20 July 2000

Federal Plan for Sustainable Development 2000-2004

Adopted by the Federal Government
of Belgium on 20 July 2000
and laid down by Royal Decree
of 19 September 2000.



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INTRODUCTION

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BELGIAN STATE

Although Belgium is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy, it is also a Federal State consisting of three *Communities* (French, Flemish and German-speaking) and three *Regions* (Walloon, Flemish and Brussels).

This complex state structure is the result of a number of institutional reforms. These reforms began in 1962-1963 with the final definition of the language border, and they have marked the gradual transition from a unitary State to a fully federal structure.

The Belgian Federal State

When it was created in 1831, Belgium was a unified State with a simple hierarchical structure on three levels: the national State, with the provinces and municipalities under its authority.

Following the institutional reforms of 1970, 1980, 1988-89 and 1993, it is gradually being transformed into a federal State. This is shown by Article 1 of the revised Constitution: '*Belgium is a federal State constituted of Communities and Regions*'. This means that several bodies (the Federal State, the Regions and the Communities) which are equal in law, now share the powers which were formerly controlled solely by the central State. In fact there is no hierarchy between these three types of authorities. Each one has its own legislative and executive bodies and, within the limitations of their competencies and territorial scope, they can pass laws or decrees which have the same legal force (as the ordinances in the Brussels- Capital Region). This absence of a hierarchy and sharing of powers between the Federal State, the Regions and the Communities constitutes the basis of Belgian federalism.

The Federal State

Although there are many powers which now fall to the Regions and Communities, the Federal State still retains authority over everything that falls within the sphere of the national interest: foreign policy and development cooperation (without prejudice to the powers of the Communities and the Regions in these matters), the judicial system, defense policy and the armed forces, supervision of the police forces, the organisation of the provinces and the municipalities, the social security system, the public debt, monetary policy, wage and price policy, some aspects of energy policy, state-owned companies, federal cultural and scientific institutions and everything that does not fall within the express powers of the Communities or the Regions. The Federal State also has some residual powers in the field of environmental policy, mainly in the area of environmental product standards, nuclear safety and the protection of the marine environment.

At the Federal level, legislative power is exercised by the King, the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate (i.e. the Parliament). Executive power is given to the King, although it is exercised by the King and the Federal Government (Council of Ministers). Elections take place every four years.

Regions and Communities

Belgium has **three Regions**, whose territory is defined by its Constitution: the Walloon Region (the five Walloon provinces), the Flemish Region (the five Flemish provinces) and the Brussels-Capital Region (19 municipalities). *Their powers are bound to their geographical area.*

The three Regions have authority over regional development and town planning, environmental policy (except the above-mentioned matters for which the Federal authorities have retained competence), rural development and nature conservation, housing, water policy, supervision of the provinces and municipalities and their financing, employment, public works, transport, economic policy, foreign trade (without prejudice to the powers of the Federal State), agriculture, most aspects of energy policy, scientific research, inter-provincial and intermunicipal services.

There are also **three Communities**, distinct from the Regions: the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. *Their powers are cultural and are bound to people* (cultural issues, education, preventive health policy and social assistance to individuals, such as family policy, protection of youth, certain aspects of social welfare).

In fact the Communities are not limited to a territory properly speaking, with the exception of the German-speaking Community (nine municipalities in the east of Belgium). However, it can be said that the Flemish Community covers the Flemish Region and the Flemish institutions established in the Brussels-Capital Region, and that the French Community covers the Walloon Region (except for the German-speaking Community) and the French-speaking institutions established in the Brussels-Capital Region.

The Regions and Communities have a considerable degree of autonomy, and exercise real powers in the areas which are allocated to them by or pursuant to the Constitution. They are also responsible for international relations in these areas.

This autonomy is illustrated by the fact that each Region and Community:

- has a parliament, known as a *Council* (of the Region or the Community) and an executive, the *Government* (of the Region or of the Community). The Regional and Community Councils are directly elected every five years;
- passes decrees (ordinances in the case of the Brussels-Capital Region) which have the force of statute;
- control their own budget, whose considerable resources come from both fiscal and non-fiscal revenues.

Municipalities

Since the amalgamations in 1976 (and 1983 for Antwerp), Belgium has 589 *municipalities*: 262 in the Walloon Region, 308 in the Flemish Region and 19 in the Brussels-Capital Region. Since the Middle Ages these have had significant powers, also reinforced by the Belgian Constitution of 1831. The municipalities are responsible for municipal issues, which are not clearly defined. Essentially they involve: civil administration (producing civil status documents and maintaining the population registry), maintaining order in the municipality, anything which the municipality considers to be in the interest of its inhabitants and which is not completely taken over by a higher authority (schools, cultural and sports centres, economic and social development or development of communal areas etc).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN BELGIUM

In 1997, five years after the Rio Conference, the Belgian federal parliament adopted the Act of 5 May 1997 on coordination of Federal sustainable development policy. The purpose of this legislation, which entered into force in June 1997, was to create a legal and institutional framework to support a process of sustainable development planning at the federal government level. The legislation provides for four main instruments: 1) an Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development, 2) a Federal Council for

Sustainable Development, 3) a Federal Report on Sustainable Development and 4) a Federal Plan for Sustainable Development

The coalition agreement of 7 July 1999, entitled "Towards the 21st Century" declares that sustainable development is one of the four main axes of the new Federal Government's policy and devotes a full chapter to "Mobility and sustainable development", which specifies that "harmonizing the economy, ecology and social protection" is one of the key objectives of government policy and that the Federal Government will make all possible efforts to fulfil Belgium's international commitments in the field of sustainable development. When the new government was formed in July 1999, the position of Secretary of State for Energy and Sustainable Development was created to underscore the cross-sectoral nature of sustainable development. The adoption, in July 2000, of the first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development marks an important step in the implementation of these policy objectives.

Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development

This committee is composed of representatives of all Federal ministries, under the chairmanship of the Secretary of State for Sustainable Development. It is entrusted with drafting the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development and coordinating and overseeing its implementation.

Federal Report on Sustainable Development

Every two years, the Federal Planning Bureau draws up a report which analyses and assesses the existing situation and policies in Belgium in relation to the relevant international processes and commitments and presents different scenarios and policy options. The first Federal Report on Sustainable Development was published in September 1999. This report constitutes a basis for public debate and political decision-making.

Federal Plan for Sustainable Development

Through the Interdepartmental Committee, the 1997 Act institutes a planning process with a view to developing "measures at the federal level to implement the objective of sustainable development", structured along the lines of Agenda 21 and based on the international commitments to which Belgium has subscribed. These measures are to be laid down every 4 years in a "Federal Plan for Sustainable Development" approved by the Council of Ministers (federal cabinet) following an extensive public participation procedure. The plan is designed to "promote the effectiveness and internal coherence of government policy" with respect to sustainable development. A draft of the plan is developed by the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development, submitted to a public consultation, amended as necessary and finally submitted to the Council of Ministers for political approval. The first draft plan was released in January 2000. Over 2000 citizens and organisations submitted comments. As a result, the first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development, which covers the period 2000-2003, was officially adopted by the Council of Ministers on 20 July 2000. It will now serve as a framework for federal government policy in the next few years.

Federal Council for Sustainable Development

In the spirit of Rio, this official advisory body, composed of representatives of the major social groups and stakeholders, was created to advise the Federal government on the draft sustainable development plan as well as proposals for legislation.

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FEDERAL PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2000-2004

This Federal Plan for Sustainable Development has been drawn up in pursuance of the Act of 5 May 1997 on coordination of Federal sustainable development policy. As provided for by that Act, "[the Plan] lays down the measures to be taken at Federal level with a view to achieving the objectives of sustainable development." The Federal Plan features both normative and indicative planning. Though the plan has been established by a Royal Decree, it is not compulsory in character and does not have direct consequences for citizens. The plan does not, then, have regulatory force, but rather indicates the main guidelines of the policy which the government intends to carry out. The measures it contains are to be elaborated and put into practice according to the usual decision-making procedures, and where appropriate will be submitted to Parliament for approval.

1. On 14 June 1992, the international community adopted in Rio de Janeiro a series of undertakings which defined a form of development, for all the world's countries, known as "sustainable development". These were: the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, the Biodiversity Convention, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Declaration of Principles concerning Forests.

2. This world-wide partnership for development and the environment in the 21st century is founded on a series of common goals, guiding principles, activities and mechanisms for a shared learning process. This common framework should allow the international community as a whole to move by degrees towards this new mode of development. Governments are committed to turning these undertakings into practical decisions.

3. Agenda 21 particularly makes the point that many countries still tend systematically to compartmentalise economic, social and environmental factors when drawing up policies and plans, or implementing them. This influences the actions of the whole of society (public authorities, industry, individuals), and affects the sustainability of development (Agenda 21; 8.2). An adjustment, or even a radical rearrangement of the decision-making process, is therefore required so as to achieve the progressive integration of economic, social and environmental issues in the pursuit of development that is economically efficient, socially equitable and responsible and environmentally sound. (Agenda 21; 8.4).

4. Five years after the Rio Conference, the international community met once more at a second world summit in order to conduct a first review of the implementation of Agenda 21¹. Considerable progress was noted in some spheres, including the creation of decision-making and consultative structures for sustainable development. But implementation of this undertaking is progressing too slowly. For that reason, one of the important decisions taken at this "Summit + 5" was the fixing of a deadline in 2002, by which time all countries of the world should have drawn up or improved their national strategies.

¹ For an overall view of the sustainable development undertakings, see Gouzée N., Zuinen N. & Willems S. (1999). Un projet à l'échelle mondiale: le développement durable. [A world-scale project: sustainable development] Planning Paper 85. Brussels : Federal Planning Bureau.

The adoption of a national strategy of sustainable development, according to Agenda 21

Governments, in cooperation, where appropriate, with international organisations, should adopt a national strategy for sustainable development based on, inter alia, the implementation of decisions taken at the Conference, particularly in respect of Agenda 21. This strategy should build upon and harmonise the various sectoral economic, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country. The experience gained through existing planning exercises such as national reports for the Conference, national conservation strategies and environment Action Plans should be fully used and incorporated into a country-driven sustainable development strategy. ... Its goals should be to ensure socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations. It should be developed through the widest possible participation. It should be based on a thorough assessment of the current situation and initiatives. (Agenda 21; 8.7)

5. In Belgium, a Federal Plan for Sustainable Development must from now on be drawn up every four years on the basis of the Federal Sustainable Development Report². The understanding and information already in the administration's possession have been drawn on as much as possible: this is important if we are to move in the direction of sustainable development using our human and other resources to the utmost. The plan has been worked out within the general framework laid down by Agenda 21, and with a view to the effectiveness and internal coherence of Belgian policy on this subject³.

6. This is the background against which the first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development emerged as a framework plan. It sits at the apex of the various sectoral economic, social and environmental plans and policies (without prejudice to their own specific remits) which apply at Federal level, with a view to imposing an overall coherence of drive and direction so that they all contribute to sustainable development. Certain methodological suggestions put forward in the Federal Sustainable Development Report have been adopted by the CIDD and a selection of priority subjects made from among the 40 broad fields (or chapters) of Agenda 21. This Plan is arranged as follows:

7. - the first part of the Plan sets out the principles, themes and objectives or "ultimate goals" of the sustainable development policies whose effectiveness and coherence this first Plan is intended to improve;

8. - the second part deals with the Federal policies aimed at the economic, social and environmental elements of sustainable development;

9. - the third part of the Plan, closely complementing the second, sets out the transversal Federal policies (or means of implementation) that support the policies aimed at achieving sustainable development objectives;

10. - the fourth part of the Plan is more particularly devoted to Federal policies encouraging participation by the major social groups in the achievement of sustainable development;

11. - - the last part presents the principles and guidelines that will guide the actors in the process of change which the Plan sets in motion: from local Children's Consultative Committees all the way to the Prime Minister and including government departments, the scientific community, and the rest of civil society.

2 Federal Planning Bureau (1999). Sur la voie d'un développement durable? ["On course for Sustainable Development?"] Federal Report on Sustainable Development. Brussels: Federal Planning Bureau.

3 Article 3, Act of 5 May 1997 on coordination of Federal sustainable development policy (Moniteur belge 18/06/1997)

12. The Federal Plan is part of the on-going process of international obligations, rules and treaties. In those fields where an appropriate international framework does not currently exist or is still too weak, the Plan makes a case for proactive intervention by the Federal authorities. By definition, a Federal Plan for Sustainable Development deals primarily with those measures that fall within the Federal remit and stem from decisions which the Federal government may take. But the Regions and Communities [component parts of the Federal structure of the Belgian constitution], as well as local and provincial authorities, also have powers which are essential for sustainable development, and coordination and joint deliberation ('concertation') are therefore indispensable. Such coordination must of course be guided by common concerns and objectives, and respect for the authority and responsibilities of each institution. For this reason, the Federal Plan is in the form of a framework plan: its objectives and measures must be given practical form over the coming months on the basis of joint deliberation and cooperation among the various levels of government.

PART 1. PRINCIPLES, THEMES AND GOALS

13. The basic documents of the world sustainable development project include those adopted at the Rio Conference and quoted in the introduction to this Plan. They deal as much with the "Why?" of sustainable development (defining a series of new goals for development) as with the "How?": the Rio Declaration defines a series of new principles, and these principles set out the "how" for this process of change and provide an authoritative guide for consideration and action relating to the issues involved in sustainable development. As to the "why?" or the "what?" or, to put it another way, the results expected from such a pattern of development, these basic documents provide new objectives or "ultimate goals" for the sustainable development of the planet. At the same time, however, they leave each country considerable scope in choosing means of implementation.



United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992

14. This process (set out in Chapter 1) and its objectives (set out in Chapter 3) do, of course, touch on all the themes of sustainable development; but only some of them can be targeted in each plan (the themes of this Framework Plan are listed in Chapter 2). The application of new principles and the definition of new goals happen gradually, since they result from a learning process on the part of all the actors in a society. This learning process occurs largely through analysis and evaluation of the effects of decisions, making it possible to adjust the arrangements for applying certain principles or the quantification of targets. Learning is also dependent on social dialogue and debate about differing visions of the future and the means for achieving these.

15. In order to carry out these undertakings, this first part of the Plan comprises three chapters, dealing in turn with:

16. - five basic principles of any sustainable development action (1);

17. - the themes of the Sustainable Development Plan (2);

18. - the objectives or "ultimate goals" of the Sustainable Development Plan (3).

1. Five basic principles of sustainable development

19. There is no single, unique principle of sustainable development. The principles which are most universally referred to under this heading are the 27 principles of the Rio Declaration (set out in an appendix to this Plan). This first Plan emphasises five of those principles. This is not to diminish the importance of implementing other important principles; but these five principles are at once the most innovative, the most characteristic, and the most all-embracing of the sustainable development project. Often, an expression or a reminder of one of these will be enough to buttress a political position that encourages the equitable satisfaction of humanity's fundamental needs and the better management of the ecosystems on which its future depends. These five are listed below, in an order which lets it be clearly seen how they fit together. The Declaration's other principles are also highly relevant: they concern either particular issues (for instance, the struggle against poverty, or sustainable consumption), particular major social groups (for instance, the importance of the role of women, or of partnership with the young, or of local communities), particular regulatory aspects (for instance, the polluter pays principle or international law), particular themes (for instance, scientific and technological progress) or, finally, other more philosophical aspects of sustainable development (such as the indivisibility of peace, development and environmental protection).

The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities

20. States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command. (Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration).

21. This first principle assigns the sustainable development project a global dimension by bringing out the universal nature of the responsibilities involved. It recognises not only the importance of cooperation but also the interdependence of the roles played by different countries. It is up to developed countries to be the first to reduce the particularly heavy pressures their societies at present apply to the common environmental heritage. Although responsibility is shared among all countries, it is the richest among them which ought to set an example and take the first steps along the path of sustainable development, by adopting sustainable modes of production and consumption both in their own territories and abroad, in their own activities and in those of their nationals. But this responsibility is common to all the world's countries. Developing countries also acknowledged it at Rio, and they too will be taking the necessary measures in a few years. They will thus, for example, put an end to deforestation for reasons connected with the dangers of climate change at the same time as the particularly high greenhouse gas emissions of the rich countries begin to diminish. The technical and financial means of the rich countries should in part be used to encourage these efforts by means of cooperation mechanisms.

Principle of intra- and inter-generational equity in the fulfilment of the right to development

22. *The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations* (Principle 3 of the Rio Declaration).

23. This principle brings to the sustainable development project a requirement that the needs of present and future generations of all the planet's peoples should be dealt with on an equitable basis. To that end, it is necessary also to be careful that the efforts required to set right the accumulated effects of the past should not be borne by just one generation (the current one). The inter-generational dimension thus takes its place alongside the classic principle of intra-generational equity, i.e., between citizens and peoples of the same generation. These two forms of equity are mutually reinforcing. The unequal distribution of wealth between the people of the North and South of the world today in fact constitutes a mortgage on the future attainability of development that is sustainable on a global scale. Long-term policy for sustainable development ought not to paralyse short-term policies, but rather strengthen their bases, coherence and quality. This principle applies both among nations and within them. Social security systems and sound public finance are, for instance, an important means of achieving intra- and inter-generational solidarity within a single country, though they are not an excuse for shying away from the necessary measures.

Principle of integration of the elements of sustainable development

24. *In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.* (Principle 4 of the Rio Declaration).

25. The principle of integration of the elements of sustainable development recognises that questions of "development" may not be reduced to consideration of what poor countries must do in order to become richer. The implication then is that a number of concepts, such as that of "well-being", need rethinking if they are to be made compatible with a sustainable pattern of development. This principle also stipulates that questions of the "environment" are not to be separated from the actions, ambitions and needs of people⁴. Truly sustainable development must systematically provide for linkages among social, economic and environmental concerns, so as to fit them together into coherent strategies. For example, a global sustainable development strategy for a vital, universal and world-wide good such as water must find a way to exploit aquifers slowly enough to allow for their recharge, thus providing the drinking water needs of the world's people in a sustainable manner. Such strategies are all the more urgent since one person in five is at present without drinking water, and current trends will exhaust major aquifers within the next 30 years.

The precautionary principle, and recognition of scientific uncertainty

26. *In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.* (Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration).

27. Far from being a principle of systematic refusal to act, the precautionary principle applies most strongly in the case of those activities which involve the risk of irreversible damage.

⁴ Introduction by Gro Harlem Brundtland. WCED [World Commission on Environment and Development], Our Common Future [the Brundtland Report] (Oxford, 1987)

Scientific uncertainties connected with contradictory expert opinions, whether in the economic, social or environmental field, may no longer be considered a justification for inaction in the face of such dangers. The precautionary principle does not in the least diminish the need for basing risk-control measures on scientific risk analysis. Acceptance of this principle implies preventive measures by the authorities for the control of potential risks even when scientific understanding is admittedly inadequate for a satisfactory degree of certainty about the extent and the nature of such risk factors. Application of the precautionary principle starts with an initial assessment of potential harmful effects, on the basis of available scientific facts and implies that, in addition to preventive measures, measures will also be taken progressively to reduce scientific uncertainty. To that end, it is admissible to entrust the producer, manufacturer or importer, rather than the public authorities, with ensuring that the scientific data needed for a complete risk analysis are made available. The preventive measures taken under the precautionary principle should be proportional to the seriousness of the potential risk and the level of protection chosen, and should be evolutionary in nature, i.e., constantly subject to revision as scientific understanding concerning the risks in question evolves.

Principle of participation, and the requirement of good governance

28. *Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.* (Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration).

29. The principle of participation aims to improve communication and fill in the gap that arises between governments and those they govern (sometimes also referred to as "civil society"). It is an illustration of the current transition towards a form of democracy which more systematically recognises and encourages the active use of citizens' political rights beyond the simple right to designate representatives once every four years. Indeed, the sustainable development project cannot succeed unless the population is actively involved. To have widespread support, it must in fact benefit from such involvement on a continuous basis. Active citizenship and various mechanisms for democratic participation reinforce representative democracy by allowing citizens greater involvement in society's debates and choices. The important role of the major social groups is recognised by means of advisory committees and forums for joint deliberation by employers, unions and other social groups. To leave the handling of dangers that could involve grave or irreversible damage entirely in the hands of decision-makers and experts would contravene this principle of participation. For every political decision where it is clear that the health of living things or of the environment as a whole is liable to be affected, the authorities concerned must identify the parties involved and take the initiative in consulting them about the decision. The experts' role is, for instance, to use the natural and medical sciences to provide relevant scientific information concerning uncertainties and the limits beyond which a production or consumption process can no longer be considered sustainable. Expert opinion and the results of deliberations with the parties involved should be presented to political decision-makers simultaneously, to provide them with a basis for taking decisions in a transparent and legitimate way. The choice of standards, or of the goals of development, may on no account be a purely technical or scientific activity. Like all questions connected with "social choice", these must be accessible to citizens and to the social groups that represent them. The proper application of this principle presupposes access to information, as well as efforts to increase citizen awareness and education about what is at stake in sustainable development. The debates concerning these choices should be public, structured and adequately documented, so as to give a fair overall picture of the scientific conclusions available. In this way, they will

allow the definition of the goals of sustainable development to be progressively refined while at the same time taking account of experience gained in the process of learning about what is really at stake and what effects policy decisions have. This learning process results not least from decision-making and planning exercises (by means of framework plans or thematic and sectoral plans) and decision evaluation exercises (including those based on analytical and forecasting reports, expert opinion, debates and joint deliberation). In this way the public will know when it is to have its say, on what, and how it can do so: and will be equipped with the means as well.

30. It should be pointed out that this principle of the Rio Declaration was supplemented five years later by a useful text which is even more open on the question of governance as a whole: Development, in turn, must involve measures that improve the human condition and the quality of life itself. Democracy, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, transparent and accountable governance in all sectors of society, as well as effective participation by civil society, are also an essential part of the necessary foundations for the realization of social and people-centred sustainable development⁵.

31. Systematic application of these five principles will allow greater coherence in the actions taken to attain the ultimate goals of sustainable development. Together, they may be considered a matrix for each of these actions, whether an act of political authority or a citizens' initiative. This matrix makes it possible to take all three aspects of sustainable development (economic, social and ecological) into account.

2. Themes of the first Sustainable Development Plan

32. The substance of this first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development has been defined using as a point of departure the 40 chapters of Agenda 21. More than half the chapters of Agenda 21 have been incorporated here, at least in part: it was of course not possible to deal with them all in a first Federal Plan. The choice of economic, environmental and social themes on which to target the plan was essentially determined by two kinds of criteria: firstly, whether there was Federal competence in these issues and, secondly, whether the themes corresponded to priorities already expressed in the Government's programme or in the demands of major social groups. The choice was also prompted by the themes dealt with in the first Federal Sustainable Development Report. That said, this first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development is above all a framework, whose purpose is to initiate a dynamic process of improvement in the coordination and effectiveness of Federal policies for sustainable development. A large part of this process will therefore be given more concrete form in years to come, as the working directions given by the Plan find practical application, including in fields not expressly addressed in this first Plan..

33. In the two sections of Agenda 21 devoted to socio-economic and environmental elements (covering the first 24 chapters), the following seven headings or themes have been selected. (These are dealt with in Part 2 of this text):

34. - combating poverty (Agenda 21; chapter 3);

35. - changing consumption patterns, including those of the public authorities (ch.4);

36. - protecting and promoting human health conditions (ch.6);

⁵ Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Special Session of the UN Assembly. June 1997.

37. - protection of the atmosphere (ch.9 - including the sustainable development of energy and of mobility);

38. - promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development (ch.14);

39. - the conservation of biodiversity (ch.15);

40. - protection and management of the marine environment (ch.17).

41. Coherence among these thematic plans should be supported by transversal policies or support developed by other departments whose field of activity is more horizontal. Such policies are set out in part 3 of this text. For this first Plan, the accent is on the chapters that follow, which stem essentially from the section of Agenda 21 entitled "Means of Implementation":

42. - international trade (chapter 2 A & B);

43. - development cooperation (ch.2 C & D and ch.37);

44. - financial and taxation aspects (ch.33 "Financial Resources and Mechanisms");

45. - science for sustainable development (ch.35);

46. - international legal instruments and mechanisms (ch. 39);

47. - information for decision-making (ch.40).

48. Agenda 21 also emphasises the interdependence that exists between the need for full participation in development by major social groups on the one hand and, on the other, the likelihood of effectively realising the objectives and policies of sustainable development. Improvement of the position of these social groups and the effective functioning of participation mechanisms in every field of sustainable development are essential to the success of the sustainable development policy being proposed. This question is dealt with in part 4 of this text.

49. The Government wishes to take this into account by strengthening coherence among the participation mechanisms where major social groups are directly represented; those groups are identified in the third section of Agenda 21 (chapters 23 to 32). These actions will be specifically targeted on the first three of these groups:

50. - Equitable participation of women for sustainable development ("Global Action for Women towards sustainable and equitable development") (ch.24);

51. - The role of children and youth in the promotion of sustainable development ("Children and youth in sustainable development") (ch.25);

52. - Equitable participation of foreigners and their communities in sustainable development (ch. 26).

53. The approach adopted for dealing with each theme in this Plan is this: the problem is introduced in a relatively short section, which also presents an action programme. Wherever

possible, concrete objectives are set out for the Plan period (2000-2003), and indicators are put forward for the monitoring of the problem as it evolves in succeeding years. The action programmes have been drawn up in agreement with the Ministries involved and form a working basis for combining what must be done with what can be done, taking into account the initial situation and the means available. Thematic plans are (or will be) worked out by the departments concerned, keeping to the general framework set out by the present Plan. In the case of some of the themes, the first task is to draw up a National Plan for that subject. In certain cases, only some of the necessary political instruments are available to the Federal public authorities, and/or compensatory actions will be needed. These thematic plans must therefore be the subject of joint deliberation with Regional and Community governments and will if necessary be given concrete expression at a later stage through cooperation agreements.

54. The chapters concerning social and economic elements, and those dealing with conservation and resource management for the purposes of development, have each been divided into four sections (forming part 2 of this project) as follows:

55. - action on consumption and production patterns;

56. - action on poverty and social exclusion, over-indebtedness, and environmental health;

57. - action on agriculture – marine environment - biodiversity;

58. - action on energy - transport - ozone and climate change.

59. The first of these sections largely relates to the economic aspect of human activities; the second, some of their social aspects; while the remaining two deal with conservation and resource management for the purposes of development, on land and at sea (third section) and in the atmosphere (fourth section). These two latter sections therefore deal with issues of biodiversity and climate change, the subjects of the two major international Conventions adopted at Rio. These four groupings are of course not the only ones possible: but the first has the advantage of highlighting some major "guiding forces" of development behind the "pressures" which weigh on natural and human resources⁶. These pressures also apply to the three other groups, revealing the pressures specifically connected with the way certain economic sectors (agriculture, energy, transport) operate. The classical main economic sectors are thus not considered solely in terms of their contribution to current Belgian production and consumption; they have been firmly integrated into these thematic groups to emphasise their link to future generations through their impacts on society and the common environmental heritage of mankind.

60. There are other relationships among these thematic groups, such as the links between health and ozone peaks, climate change and biodiversity, consumption patterns and excessive debt (of public authorities and of individuals), etc. Economic sectors are also linked to the needs of the least well-off, through the social policies put forward in the second section. The policies suggested for each theme are offered as "responses" to the problems that have been raised. The following section reviews a series of links among economic, environmental and social goals of sustainable development policy as they relate to these thematic four groups; these are also set out in the introduction to each section.

⁶ This corresponds to the logic of the DPSIR model (Driving forces, pressures, state, impact, responses) model used to classify sustainable development indicators

3. Objectives, or "ultimate goals" of a pattern of sustainable development

61. The principles of sustainable development provide for a process of systematic consideration of the results, objectives or "ultimate goals" of a society's development, ensuring a democratic basis for "social choices". One part of the ultimate goals of sustainable development is defined in the basic documents of the global sustainable development project, or in the more binding legal frameworks for sustainable development at European, Belgian Federal, Regional or local level, which reflect the practice of democracy in the societies concerned. The adoption of these new development goals is undoubtedly a step forward, resulting from a considerable amount of political work over recent decades. But this work is far from finished. Setting these goals is a task that has required and will continue to require translation into more concrete terms that provide an increasingly clear strategy to ensure their practical application. This is the process that is being systematically begun at Federal level in the following parts of this Plan. Each thematic Action Plan starts with a statement of strategic objectives and is careful not to confuse objectives with means (in this case, the "means" are the policies to be applied). As regards objectives, we may give one example to clarify the difference between "ultimate" or "final" goals and "strategic" or "intermediate" goals: the ultimate goal of climate policies is to stabilise the concentrations of greenhouse gases at a level thought to be safe for the climate system. Their strategic (or intermediate) objective is to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases by x % compared with their 1990 levels. The level of "x" varies according to country and timeframe.

62. This Plan is thus intended to work towards a series of ultimate goals for sustainable development and prepare the means to attain them. Together, these ultimate goals make up the vision of the future which forms the basis for this Plan. In order to reach those objectives, our country's national debt must be quickly reduced to a level of 60% of GDP, the level considered acceptable at the European level, as agreed in the Stability Programme for 2000-2004.

63. The objectives of sustainable development are generally classified into three main areas⁷:

64. - the economic objectives of sustainable development essentially involve meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This implies, among other things, adopting patterns of consumption and production that reduce environmental stress and meet the basic needs of humanity; (Agenda 21; 4.7); this process is based on the search for a balance between production and consumption that resolves the problems of over- or under-production, and the under- or over-consumption of certain goods and services;

65. - the social objectives of sustainable development are viewed not only as applying within communities, but also among communities. They must arrange for a sharing not only of financial means but also of natural resources, as well as cultural integration. These objectives must particularly accord the highest priority to the basic needs of the least well-off. The efforts undertaken should enable these people to participate to the greatest possible extent in the world of work. So far as poverty is concerned, the ultimate goal is to ensure that all States and all peoples cooperate in the essential task of eliminating poverty, which is an indispensable condition of sustainable development (principle 5 of the Rio Declaration). It is not a matter of indiscriminate redistribution, but rather of giving the entire population the opportunity to earn a sustainable livelihood (Agenda 21; 3.4). This objective also involves the urgent working out, for all the disinherited regions of the world, of integrated strategies and programmes that include ones for the reduction and elimination of poverty, for job and income generation (in this respect, a dynamic labour market, supported by political intervention,

⁷ Referring to the Brundtland Report, published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development, composed of international experts meeting at the request of the UN and chaired by Ms Gro Harlem Brundtland: Our Common Future [the Brundtland Report] (Oxford, 1987), p.51.

represents an extremely important means of social improvement) and the mobilisation of resources;

66. - the environmental objectives of sustainable development are above all concerned with the respecting of limits in the management of natural resources, taking technological development and institutional structures into account. The defining of these limits to environmental capacities thus allows for the fact that (eco-) efficiency in the use of these resources may be enhanced to some degree by adapting technologies and institutional structures. At the same time, these objectives also acknowledge the limitations of the environment's capacities, both for the supply of energy and raw materials and for assimilating waste and polluting emissions⁸. These objectives also involve adopting and respecting ecological principles and priorities for the rational use of the environment (including the restoration of such ecological damage as is reversible), and the designing of national and international legislation on liability for pollution and other environmental damage, and compensation to their victims (Rio Declaration).

67. In practice there are often trade-offs that have to be made, and even conflicts in the short term, among the social, environmental and economic objectives of sustainable development. Environmental policies and the meeting of the basic needs of the poorest, such as those for jobs, food, energy, water and hygiene, for instance, are thought of as costly policies in terms of public finance. Another example: certain patterns of growth involve important social and environmental costs. In the short term, the costs of social and environmental projects, also, may be extremely high: and these projects may even appear to be mutually incompatible, when the measures that would favour one are liable to have an adverse impact on the other in certain ways. Nevertheless, when rather more long-term assessments are made, and for a wider scope (for instance, taking a national or a world view) certain development projects manage a balanced and simultaneous improvement in respect of all three of these main categories of objective. These are sustainable development projects which, many of them, apply one form of regulation or another in order to put right current deficiencies in markets, or of public authorities. One example of such a kind of project is the transferring of the financial burden at present bearing on employment to taxation of energy or other scarce resources. Such projects, if carefully complemented by effective strategies for involving all the players concerned, can have the advantage of neither unbalancing public revenues, nor aggravating the tax burden, while they create employment by decreasing the cost of labour and encourage a more rational use of environmental resources by raising their price. All the same, it is important not to lose sight of the risks to the competitiveness of enterprises in an integrated Europe. Furthermore, this "double dividend" from a shift of tax from employment towards eco-taxation is not a permanent one. What happens, if the environmental taxes cause a drop in the level of the activity in question, is that this constitutes a shrinking of the taxable base, and a lessening of tax revenue which could possibly lead to a recourse to new taxes.

68. These themes and their objectives are interconnected by a plethora of links, whose importance is generally underestimated. The work required to bring out these cross-links, and so to integrate the elements of sustainable development for each of the relevant themes, and in each of the relevant sectors, is the very core of the sustainable development approach. This task however is plagued by all kinds of obstacles, some of them institutional and some scientific. The process begun by this Plan aims also at the smoothing of these obstacles. We shall now examine a few examples of these cross-links.

69. - In paragraph 65, a link is indicated between the notion of poverty and the quality of the required means for existence. The meaning of the term "poverty" depends, at least in part,

⁸ The concept of "environmental space", which refers to this limitation as well as the equal rights of each of the world's citizens to use part of the common environmental heritage, has been studied by scientists investigating the possibility of translating these various objectives in as global a manner as possible.

on the patterns of life generally accepted in particular countries and at particular times. The objective of reducing differences in standards of living is thus linked with the feasibility of better satisfying the needs of most of the world's people. The sustainable management of natural resources is also one of the objectives aimed at in combating poverty; for if want of timely care allows these resources to be degraded, the result can only be an impoverishment for the whole community in the longer term, and will cause a lessening of the productivity of human and ecological capital.

70. - In this way, the objective of sustainable consumption, too, targets all three elements (economic, environmental and social) of sustainable development, since it involves promoting types of consumption and production which reduce environmental stress while still meeting essential human needs. In terms of sustainable development, growth of consumption or of production is no end in itself. In all sectors of the economy (agriculture, transport, energy) growth is to be assessed in terms of the contribution it makes to social and environmental needs. For instance, the various options for development of mobility must not be analysed only in economic terms; we must also take into consideration the effects of this mobility on the objectives of health protection and of quality of the atmosphere.

71. - There are other links, seldom appreciated, between the state of the environment and that of the economy. Economic activities put pressure on the marine environment in ways that can cause eutrophication, decline in fish stocks, and degradation of seas and coasts. Climate changes, to give another example, are attributed directly or indirectly to human activities (energy, agriculture...) which alter the composition of the atmosphere by their emissions of greenhouse gases. Since the concentration of these gases is constantly rising, international action is directly aimed at stabilising these concentrations, at a level which is thought safe for the climate system. This ultimate goal of the policies and measures for combating the intensification of the greenhouse effect, has been translated into quantified targets, for 2000 and 2010, described as "intermediate" or "strategic" objectives (i.e. more concrete than the ultimate goals), for the stabilisation or reduction of emissions.

72. But the most weighty policies and measures needed have not yet been put into practice, for they go to the heart of the economic activities, the social preoccupations and the lifestyles of a society. They concern in fact not only energy, transport and agriculture, but also chemicals, the rest of industry, jobs, the consumption of public administrations and of households, etc. This applies also to the objectives of protecting the marine environment and biodiversity. The objective of conservation of biodiversity, of the sustainable use of the life forms that it is made up of, and the just and equitable sharing of the exploitation of genetic resources, likewise demand the designing of strategies that can challenge a whole series of generally accepted economic aims. To this end, it would be as well to investigate new types of synergies that could arise from the combination of an active welfare State, the emerging "new economy " and the arrival of active environmental guardianship.

73. The pursuit of the objectives described above requires human and financial resources, which immediately makes it liable in principle to provoke an increase in public expenditure. Sound public finances are at the same time no less indispensable for sustainable development. For this reason it is important that in addition to the determination of what resources are needed, there should also be an examination, from the point of view of sustainable development, to see which existing expenditures might be foregone in compensation. The search for this balance, with the objectives of sustainable development in mind, is essential if the expenditure absolutely required for sustainable development is to be forthcoming.

PART 2. FEDERAL POLICIES AIMED AT THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

74. How should a framework plan be organised so as to gather together the various themes, social, economic and environmental, when they differ as much as combating poverty, changing private and public consumption patterns, protecting and promoting human health, and protecting the atmosphere - when they cover also the sustainable development of energy and mobility, the promoting of sustainable agriculture and rural development, the conservation of biodiversity and the protection of the marine environment?

75. How are the synergies between economic development and social progress to be strengthened? How can we ensure that economic development is compatible with, and not opposed to, proper management of the environment? How can we see that social actions fit in with environmental actions, instead of vying with each other for shares in economic budgets, which always have their limits?

76. This is the essence of the challenge raised in this Part 2, which does not see this Sustainable Development Plan as a simple heaping together of the plans of different sectors but envisages it, on the contrary, as the crucible of a vision of long-term sustainable development and a truly intersectoral approach. This challenge is both one of policy and one of method; for what it demands is better political coordination and more careful articulation among economic, social and environmental policies which target the objectives of sustainable development.

77. It is in order to improve this coordination and in an attempt to illustrate these articulations that the different themes have been grouped into four sections. This arrangement makes it possible for decision-makers' attention to be drawn to the relations of interdependence, the "links" that exist among the different themes, links which generally go unmentioned for lack of a proper, overall approach. This arrangement, then, covers two categories of links:

78. - the relations among the themes within each section (or "intra-theme-group" relations);

79. - the relations among themes of different sections (or "inter-theme-group" relations).

80. Both are illustrated here, in the section which deals with the ultimate goals of each theme (1.2) and in the four sections individually devoted to theme groups in this part 2.

81. The proposals made in each of these four sections do not claim to form an exhaustive list of all possible political actions on each theme; nor do they claim to limit themselves to matters within the Federal remit. They are, rather, presented here in order to call for a more overall approach to the whole of sustainable development policy, and better dovetailing of the policies carried on at all government levels which affect these themes.

82. As to the Federal policies and measures put forward for each of these themes, they are sometimes embedded in the theme plans, and sometimes simply offered as an idea or project that could be developed during the period of the Plan. The aim of this Plan is to bring these together so as to make sure that their implementation - and drafting - is done in a more concerted way than it has been in the past.

This second part of the Plan is therefore composed of four major sections, each of which is made up of a number of themes.

1. ACTIONS ON PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION:

- *Policies for information, education and public awareness*
- *Policies for products*

- *Policies for consumption by public administrations*

2. ACTIONS ON POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION, OVER-INDEBTEDNESS, AND HEALTH:

- *Policies for combating poverty and social exclusion*
- *Policy for reducing over-indebtedness*

- *Policies for environmental health*

3. ACTIONS ON AGRICULTURE – MARINE ENVIRONMENT – BIODIVERSITY:

- *Policy promoting sustainable development of agriculture*
- *Policy of protecting and managing the marine environment*
- *Policy for conservation of biodiversity*

4. ACTIONS ON ENERGY – TRANSPORT - OZONE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- *Policy promoting sustainable development of energy*
- *Policy promoting mobility compatible with sustainable development of transport*
- *Policy for protecting the atmosphere*

1. Actions on patterns of consumption and production

83. This first "group of themes"⁹ concerns one important "guiding force" of development: the evolution of end-user consumption, i.e. consumption by individuals and public administrations. First of all, we set this matter within the framework of sustainable development. Its links with the theme groups of the following sections are then presented. Last comes the broad Action Plan for it, essentially at Federal level. This consists of three main policies, which complement each other: consumption policy; the creation of favourable conditions for emergence of the new economy, as crucible of new patterns of production and consumption; and lastly, integrated product policy as an element of production policy. The integration of these strategies, on both supply and demand sides, will in future play an essential role. On the demand side, consumption policy will itself be composed of three main levers: a policy for public information, a policy for standards to be met by products put on the market, and a consumption policy for public administrations.

84. This section deals with end-user consumption, not intermediate consumption by producers. For this reason, most of the objectives and policies of this section concern households and public administrations. Nevertheless, the objective of changing patterns of consumption also implies that producers should only market products that are safe and respect the environment in use. One part, therefore, of this section addresses producers, via product policy (see paragraph 134). As for production objectives, and other policies concerning production, these are tackled in part in the other sections of this Plan, sector by

⁹ This is in fact the single, grand theme of Agenda 21: changing patterns of consumption and production. However, it does contain a great number of different thematic aspects, some of which vary with the nature of the production and consumption considered.

sector (Energy, Transport, Agriculture).

1.1. Present situation



reporters/Pierre Ache

Household consumption plays a crucial role in development

85. Consumption by households and public administrations plays a fundamental role in development. It accounts for some 76% of GDP, and is part and parcel of the everyday life of the people. Since the second world war, governments have taken on the task of increasing well-being by raising living standards and the quality of life, mainly by means of increasing incomes. They have succeeded to a great extent, even if not everyone has shared equally in the benefits. However, this policy has also been attended by social and environmental externalities¹⁰ which have been negative effects of the rise in levels of consumption; and these have not until now had enough attention from governments in the course of policy formation. In environmental terms, for instance, we have the rise in atmospheric CO₂ emissions arising from economic activities. In social terms, it is the distribution of consumption (both between the peoples of developed countries and those of developing countries, and within individual countries) which gives cause for concern, as also does the question of respect for human rights in production arrangements. There are also health problems related to

various forms of stress and malnutrition, particularly among children. In economic terms, there is, for instance, the proper management of non-renewable resources which has to be guaranteed if these negative externalities are to be reduced and efficiency improved. Thus it is the level of consumption of non-renewable resources, as well as the contents of consumption, and its distribution over different places and periods, which come under scrutiny with the new requirement for sustainable consumption.

86. There are some aspects of the current consumption pattern of industrialised countries which are not sustainable and cannot be spread throughout the world. Therefore the industrialised countries, including Belgium, have undertaken to take the lead in achieving sustainable consumption patterns (Agenda 21; 4.8). Strategies must be put in place in the industrialised countries to reduce consumption of energy and of raw materials. Attainment of

¹⁰ External effects which occur when, in the course of an economic activity an actor incidentally imposes certain costs (negative externality or social costs) or confers certain benefits (positive externality or social benefits) on other actors, which costs or benefits are not converted into some part of the price of the transaction.

objectives such as Factor 4 or Factor 10 (meaning a reduction in the ratio of consumption of energy and of raw materials to production to one-quarter or one-tenth of its present level over a number of years) is the object of studies at international level (see also the theme 'energy').

87. This first section of the Plan aims at putting this undertaking into practice. It involves three main thrusts of a strategy of sustainable consumption, which target three different groups. The first policy is aimed directly at consumers, through information, education and public awareness measures for the changing of consumption patterns. The second policy, a policy for products, aims to get producers to adopt manufacturing procedures which respect the environment, encourage social integration and respect for International Labour Organisation standards, and put products on the market which conserve, or even improve, health and the environment when used. The adoption and development of such products, which are more and more in demand from consumers, will be a springboard for the promotion of Belgian firms. Special incentive measures will be looked into, for strengthening and assisting the capabilities of SMEs [Small and Medium-sized Enterprises] in this field. Lastly, the third policy applies to Federal administrations as consumers of goods and services in the course of their activities, ensuring that they manage their various patterns of consumption in a sustainable way.

88. The three policies of this section are closely connected with the other themes of this Plan. These two aspects of sustainable consumption (distribution of consumption and satisfaction of basic needs) are dealt with as part of the social themes, under policies for combating poverty and under policies for reduction in over-indebtedness and for health protection: for we have to acknowledge that over-indebtedness weighs chiefly on the poorest households, and prevents them satisfying certain basic needs (or makes them go deeper into debt in order to acquire the goods to enable them to satisfy their basic needs), which can only increase the risk of their social exclusion. As for the links between consumption and poverty, we can see, for instance, that the proportion of malnourished people is highest in the case of the poorest households.

89. The links between consumption and agriculture appear in Section 3, which concerns agriculture, biodiversity and marine and land-based pollution. Consumers' everyday choices can influence production methods and so contribute to conserving biodiversity and restricting sources of marine and land-based pollution. This can take place, for instance, when consumers are properly informed and can make product choices knowing what is involved: in this way they influence the process of production.

90. Lastly, the pressures that households and public administrations put on the atmospheric environment through their daily consumption of energy and motor transport are tackled in Section 4. By their choices on transport and energy use, and by their mode of use of transport and other energy-consuming goods, consumers can make considerable changes to the amount of stress they cause to the environment, to their quality of life (noise, public spaces, etc.) and to their health. These stresses can also be lessened by a product policy which prescribes energy consumption for goods put on the market.

1.2. Action Plan

1.2.1. Strategic objectives

91. In order to fulfil the commitment undertaken in Agenda 21 in terms of introducing sustainable consumption patterns in Belgium, the Government will take the necessary measures to attain the following strategic objectives between now and 2003.

92. In the agro-food domain, the Government will continue to guarantee the quality of food products put on the market, with the aim of protecting human health and the environment and restoring, even promoting, the image of our products abroad. The Government has also set itself the following objectives:

93. - a market share for organic farming products of 4% between now and 2003. Products from organic farming should represent 4% of all food purchases by public administrations as well, and public authority cafeterias will offer a meal based on organic food on a daily basis;

94. - a market share for products labelled as coming from socially responsible production of 4% between now and 2003. Such products should represent 4% of all food purchases by public administrations as well;

95. - with a view to improving the health of individuals, measures will be taken to encourage Belgian consumers in the direction of more balanced diets. This policy will among other things aim to increase the proportion of fresh fruit and vegetables eaten by Belgians (an increase of around 8 kg per person per year between 1999 and 2003), so as eventually to reach the European average and reduce the excessive amounts of carbohydrates, fats and animal proteins consumed. As regards carbohydrates, the aim will be to reduce the proportion of rapidly absorbed sugars and increase that of complex carbohydrates from vegetable products such as cereals, roots and legumes.

96. Concerning the European ecological label that has been elaborated for certain categories of products at European level¹¹, measures will be taken to have at least 10 products, imported or made in Belgium, bearing the European ecological label on the Belgian market by 2004.

97. Monitoring the quality of farm produce by the Federal Food Safety Agency, both sector by sector and enterprise by enterprise, including efforts to have integrated self-monitoring systems set up. In order to guarantee effective monitoring all along the food chain, it is necessary to set up a system by which the origin and destination of ingredients can be traced.

98. In the energy field, with the aim of fulfilling the Kyoto undertakings and in line with the objectives and measures mentioned in the "energy, transport, ozone and climate change" section of this plan, the policy operated will aim to reduce household consumption by 7.5% in 2010 compared with 1990, and that of public administrations by 10% for premises as a whole in 2004 compared with 1999.

99. So far as water is concerned, within the framework of a collective effort to reduce water consumption, Federal public administrations will reduce their water consumption by 6 m³ per civil servant compared with 1999, between now and 2004.

100. The policy of simplifying government administration will be speeded up. This policy should have the effect of reducing the consumption of paper due to the Federal administration significantly (25%).

101. On the subject of waste, the measures taken under this present plan should support the objectives for waste reduction, sorting and recycling set by the governments of the Regions in their own Plans. The Federal government will also make a contribution to the prevention of waste, not least by introducing legislation on product standards, and by fiscal instruments. As for the Federal public administrations, they are committed to reducing by 30 kg per civil servant the quantity of unsorted waste in 2003 compared with 1999, and to favouring the purchase of products which avoid the generating of waste.

102. For the respecting of basic rights of workers and for the benefit of socio-economic development, Belgium will develop a 'social' [ethical] label, to be accorded to goods and/or services produced with respect for the basic International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions^{12a}. Belgium will also encourage other labels favouring fairer trade. On the basis of its own experience, it will support the adoption of these labels at both European and

11 Currently the product categories are footwear, textiles, light bulbs, mattresses, refrigerators, laundry, dishwasher detergents, washing machines, dishwashers, copier paper, soil improvers, computers, absorbent paper, paints and varnishes. Other product categories are being defined.

12a (i) Forced Labour Conventions (29 and 105) ; (ii) Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (84 and 87) ; (iii) Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (98) ; (iv) Equal Remuneration Convention (100) and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (111) and (v) Minimum Age Convention (138)

multilateral levels. The objective is to improve working conditions in Belgium and in the rest of the world, and to encourage the economic and social development of developing countries' populations (see also Part 3, Foreign trade).

103. Activities of producing goods and services, including those of public administrations, will encourage social integration and so support the attainment of the objectives of combating poverty and social exclusion (see section 2).

104. Progress towards these objectives must be monitored by means of a series of indicators, both ones that exist already and others to be developed:

105. - General indicators of economic development: gross domestic product (GDP) per inhabitant, the proportion of GDP accounted for by the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, the rate of inflation, and the ratio of debt to GDP. There are also other general indicators that need developing, such as: (i) budgetary and convergence indicators, which measure the progress made under the Federal Plan, and the effect of the Federal Plan on implementation of the Stability Pact at European level; (ii) indicators concerning improvements in sound finance, and structural improvements in the overall economic fabric, both indispensable conditions for the financial and monetary implementation of the Federal Plan; (iii) indicators of market penetration, and technological potential for growth, of Belgian enterprises as a result of favourable economic, social and environmental conditions ;

106. - Indicators concerning the consumption of goods and services by households and public administrations. The most important^{12b} of these are : in the domain of nutrition, changes in the level of sales of organic farming and fair trade products, as well as changes in prices of these products; and the composition of the Belgian diet (consumption of meat, fish, cereals, fruits, and vegetables in kg/inhabitant, and nutrient intake - calories, protein, carbohydrates and fats); in the field of waste, production of waste per inhabitant, re-use and recycling rates for various different types of waste at household level; for water, abstraction intensities as a percentage of available resources and changes in the price of water; so far as energy is concerned, the breakdown of household consumption by function (heating, electrical appliances, mobility) and by type of energy (gas, petrol/diesel/oil, electricity) as well as changes in the price of energy. A number of indicators on public administrations' consumption of water and of energy, and on their waste production, will make up an 'instrument panel' (see 'Policy for consumption by public administrations'). Indicators of the satisfaction of basic needs (water, energy, etc.) need to be monitored, also, in both developing and industrialised countries, as do indicators on distribution of consumption within Belgium and between industrialised countries and developing countries;

107. - Indicators of the quality of goods consumed, to show, among other things, the quality and efficiency of supervision/inspection of production chains, and in particular the food production chain. The government is committed to establishing such indicators during the implementation of this Plan, in collaboration with the organisations of those who make and market the products concerned;

108. - Indicators concerning IPP (Integrated product policy), EPD (Eco-product development) and production structures, in order to encourage harmonious development both of Belgian firms' potential for growth and innovation (in technical, human and financial terms) and of new market realities;

109. - Lastly, indicators which establish a direct link between total non-renewable resources of the ecosystem and human consumption. These data could lead to the development of indicators of socio-economic impact.

^{12b} These indicators are for the most part taken from OECD publications and studies for identifying a series of indicators that will allow measurement of progress towards more sustainable patterns of consumption (OECD (1999). Towards more sustainable household consumption patterns – indicators to measure progress. ENV/EPOC/SE (98)2/FINAL. Paris.

1.2.2. Policies

110. To attain the objectives referred to above, three policies are to be implemented: a policy of information, education and awareness about sustainable consumption, in order to induce households to adopt more appropriate behaviour without limiting freedom of choice, a products policy which aims, among other things, at bringing to market products which use less in the way of non-renewable resources and generate less waste, and lastly a policy which concerns the environmental and social management of public administrations. The measures referred to under the other themes of this plan, especially those concerning farming, energy and transport, will also make a contribution to the achievement of these objectives.

a. Policy of information, education and public awareness

Context

111. Through a number of recent studies, consumers have shown a growing awareness of the social and environmental problems connected with current patterns of development and with the contents of their consumption. More than half say they are ready to alter some aspects of their behaviour in order to conserve the environment and protect their health. One study¹³ showed over 70% of consumers are increasingly sensitive to product quality, to the notion of environmental protection, and to fair and equitable trade between developed and developing countries. Another enquiry¹⁴ revealed that over 60% of those interviewed declared their readiness to buy products which were more environmentally friendly, to use less water in order to preserve the quality of the environment, and to sort their waste. So far as nutrition is concerned, consumers are also showing more and more sensitivity to the quality and balance of their diet.

112. Now at present these values and attitudes are not finding expression in the consumers' behaviour. For instance, the market share of products labelled "organic produce" or "fair trade" barely reaches 1% or 2%, while water and energy consumption have continued to rise in recent years. Food consumption in Belgium is marked by a number of imbalances: low consumption of fresh vegetables (38 kg per inhabitant per year, compared with a European average of 74.7 kg) and excessive consumption of fat and rapidly-absorbed sugars.

113. Among the obstacles consumers encounter in trying to translate their values into effective behaviour are problems connected with the need for accurate, authenticated public information: lack of information, confused information (multiplicity of labels, advertising, etc.) and information which is hard to read or interpret (one consumer in three has difficulty reading or understanding labels¹⁵), insufficient confidence about the accuracy of information, including that on labels, gaps in education about the subject, etc. Goods and services produced under environment-friendly conditions or good working conditions generally cost more, and this also forms an obstacle (see paragraphs 122 and 141). It is therefore necessary to improve the clarity, brevity and trustworthiness of the information provided to consumers about sustainable consumption, and to reduce these products' production costs, as well as the VAT charged on them, in order to be able to market them more cheaply without harming wages. On this subject, education in schools also plays a considerable role in alerting the young to the part they will be playing, as citizens and consumers, and to the practices that it is proper to adopt with a view to sustainable consumption. This will require

13 Study by Survey & Action, March 1998 : survey of 1010 Belgian consumers aged 15-77 yrs. (La Libre Belgique, 24/09/1998).

14 Inquiry by the universities ULB and KU Leuven commissioned by the CFDD (1999). CFDD INFO. Bulletin d'information trimestriel du Conseil fédéral de développement durable. N°1. June 1999. Brussels.)

15 Opinion poll conducted by the INRAMarketing inquiry bureau, 600 Belgians (CRIOC (1999). Du côté des consumers. N°51. p.5. Brussels.)

joint arrangements with Communities. Information about positive developments in terms of product quality and patterns of production is also clearly necessary (e.g. HACCP).

Measures

114. This policy will have three main components:

115. - the first component will concern the development of measures for information and education, and their coordination among the Federal Government, the Regions, Communities, the provincial and local authorities, on the subject of sustainable consumption. This coordination will aim at: (i) defining and carrying out a general awareness campaign on the theme of sustainable consumption; (ii) reinforcing the information campaigns conducted by the consumers and other associations for consumer awareness of the proper behaviour to adopt with a view to sustainable consumption (choices, pattern of use, disposal of products, reducing consumption; but also changing diets, and the links between health and the environment); (iii) organising discussion forums where the different players involved can meet; (iv) lastly, giving training in schools on this subject, as well as vocational training in collaboration with Communities. Particular attention will be paid in such training to the many different dimensions of sustainable consumption;

116. -The second component will concern a full implementation of the government's intended product policy (see the next point). This will cover promotion of various labels assuring consumers, producers and distributors as to certain 'sustainable' properties of products on the market. These will include the "organic farming" label, the label for environment-friendly stone fruit, the European eco-label, as well as the label to certify socially responsible production and other labels encouraging fairer trade (see paragraph 145) The government will encourage creation of these last two labels at European level. The government will also see to it that clear and correct information is provided on the labels, which will be subject to an independent and objective procedure for granting and monitoring, in order to keep a uniform set of labels, based on measurable criteria with a scientific basis. The government will make sure it avoids putting further burdens on the commercial and administrative running of enterprises, especially SMEs, due to a counterproductive proliferation of labels. The government will also be arguing at European level for harmonisation of labels across Europe. Lastly, following many calls for the creation of a "sustainable development" label, the government will ask the CFDD to draw up a recommendation about the concept and contents of such a label, so that all aspects may be correctly targeted; this will be followed by a scientific feasibility study;

117. - the third component will concern labelling and advertising:

118. -first of all, the government will introduce a bill to amend the Act of 14 July 1991 on commercial practices, with the aim of prohibiting any advertising which makes false or misleading claims, indications or representations as to the manner, date or social [employment] conditions of a product's manufacture or the provision of a service. To this end, the work of the Environmental Advertising and Labelling Committee (CEPE) will be extended to include advertising and labelling which makes "ethical" claims, and its composition will be enlarged to include representatives of groups which have accumulated some experience with labels of an ethical or social character;

119. – secondly, if by 31 December 2000 there has not been substantial progress in the application of the Code of Ecological Advertising¹⁶ (at present a voluntary code of practice) the Code will be made compulsory, with some novel forms of sanction (for instance, an advertising counter-campaign). With this in view, the Ecological Advertising and Labelling Committee will have its status and functioning reviewed (see

16 Code designed by the Environmental Advertising and Labelling Committee in 1997.

also Part 4 - Advisory Councils). The Committee should, for instance, be able to act more energetically and rapidly in the detection of abuses of ecological and ethical advertising and labelling. It needs also to ensure better consumer information on the means available for reacting quickly to advertising which makes false environmental or ethical claims;

- 120.** - thirdly, following many observations from citizens which clearly indicate their preoccupation with the impact of advertising on purchasing behaviour and patterns of consumption, not least when targeted on children and the young, the government will examine the problems of the relationship between advertising and patterns of consumption, the impact of advertising on the young, informative advertising and experience abroad in regulating such matters, but without making advertising into a scapegoat. This study could lead to the drawing up of a programme of work to be carried out in the course of the Belgian EU Presidency;
- 121.** - in addition, legislation on the subject of labelling will be reviewed in consultation with the European authorities, so as to suit it to the new situation of society, and to make labelling really help consumers to make their choices in the light of sustainable consumption. As part of this, the CEPE will be establishing, by the end of 2000, a proposal which would make it possible to ensure a reasonably-sized and coherent system of labelling (including the labels "green" and "ethical") which will be legible and comprehensible for consumers.

122. Consumer awareness of what is at stake in sustainable consumption is also affected by the prices of products on the market. Because of this, there is a need to examine, case by case, whether fiscal policy can differentiate between the treatment of products whose production or consumption gives rise to adverse effects on society or ecology (cf. paragraph 141) and other products; and, if so, how. The possibilities for doing this by means of incentives (sometimes positive, sometimes negative), while still maintaining the competitiveness of Belgian firms within the European framework, and ensuring that the poorest households are compensated, should be looked into.

Implementation of the Plan

- 123.** The relevant bodies are:
- 124.** - the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment;;
- 125.** - the Ministry of Economic Affairs;
- 126.** - the Ministry of Agriculture and the Middle Classes;
- 127.** - the Finance Ministry;
- 128.** - the Prime Minister's Department (eco-taxes);
- 129.** - the Ministry of Labour and Employment;;
- 130.** - the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
- 131.** -the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and International Cooperation;
- 132.** -the relevant departments of the Regions and Communities for these matters.
- 133.** Joint bodies, such as the Interdepartmental Committee on Sustainable Development (CIDD) and the Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy (CCPIE) may also play an important part in this matter. A Working Group will be set up on "changes in consumption patterns" with a remit to see to progress under this Plan. This Working Group

should have the assistance of a number of expert groups. One of these groups should concern itself with information, education and public awareness policy.

b. Products policy

Context

134. To date, policies for limiting environmental stress have mainly been connected with regulating the process of production, and have interfered very little with the characteristics of the products put on the market. However, it has now become apparent that the use and disposal of products is likewise the source of many forms of environmental harm (pollution, noise, waste, etc.) and of various health problems. In order to make patterns of consumption sustainable, therefore, it is also important that products are available whose use and disposal puts as little stress on health or the environment as possible (e.g.: eco-efficient products, replacement of material with immaterial products, replacement of certain products with services that meet the same needs, etc.). This product policy will of course also take into account environmental and health impacts 'upstream', due to manufacturing procedures. A vertically integrated approach must therefore be adopted, with analysis of the whole of a product's life-cycle from the extraction of the raw materials, through their treatment and the manufacture of the finished product and then its distribution, up to the end use and management of the eventual wastes. Putting an approach of this kind in place demands close cooperation among the different levels of government, each of which have means of action which operate on different stages of the product life-cycle. It is the Regions which have responsibility for industrial policy and thus for manufacturing processes. Waste, also, comes within their remit. The Federal Government has powers over the marketing of products, and fiscal powers. But it is the European Union which has the job of guaranteeing that products are compatible with the European internal market. A products policy therefore involves,



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The use and disposal of products are a source of numerous environmental nuisances and health problems

among other things, a successful institutional coordination between Regional and Federal governments. Analysis of product life-cycles must be done in a scientific manner.

135. Production, transformation and distribution chains have grown progressively more complex since the 1950s. More and more intermediaries are involved, and the distance between original producer and final consumer has become greater. This evolution makes it harder, but also more necessary, to monitor the chain of production and distribution with due rigour. This involves oversight of manufacturing procedures, the quality of the products handled, and the features of products put on the market, as well as working conditions for people. The monitoring of production patterns and of products should so far as possible be applied to producers in the form of 'self-supervision', or by recourse to private sector inspection bodies. In such cases, the public authorities should deploy systems for surveillance of this self-supervision, so that a double ["two-tier"] monitoring mechanism is established, which results in the greatest efficiency in use of public monitoring resources. In the domain of food, there have been experiences in the past which have shown that defects in the safety and quality of foodstuffs within the food production chain can bring serious consequences in both human and economic terms. When we consider the growing number of goods and services produced, as a result of globalisation, in faraway countries with low labour costs, we cannot help recognising that workers' economic and social rights are not being respected in these production activities. What this means is that for there to be sustainable patterns of consumption, it is also important to remove the pressures (such as disregard of these economic and social rights) that affect workers in the course of production activities. These activities ought rather to function as instruments of social integration and development.

Measures

136. In this context, and in order to attain the strategic objectives described above, the government will take the following measures.

137. A Guide Plan for Products will be drawn up by the Federal Department for Environmental Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment, in collaboration with the divisions concerned. This Plan will be based on the work of the European Commission on integrated product policy, which aims to analyse products in terms of their environmental effects over the whole of their life cycle ("from the cradle to the grave"). This policy must be supported by the participation of all the players concerned, and by the enactment of a coordinated set of instruments: regulations, economic instruments, instruments of communication (see the measures concerning labelling and labels, above) and voluntary agreements. This Guide Plan for Products, then, will contain six main headings.

138. -The first heading covers improvement in the coherence and active, coordinated enforcement of existing legislation concerning product standards: framework legislation on the protection of health and the environment¹⁷, on health and safety at work¹⁸.and on consumer safety¹⁹ The government will take measures to implement European regulations and directives within the deadlines fixed, to participate more actively in future in the defining of these standards (features, composition, packaging, display, storage) at European and world level, to design methods for analysing the product life-cycle, taking international studies into account, and to reach voluntary agreements with individual industries and economic sectors if those provide better results than other instruments, in economic, social and environmental terms. These measures will be taken jointly with the Regions when necessary. The government will also see to improving consumers' and workers' participation in standard-

¹⁷ Act of 21/12/1998 concerning product standards, with the object of promoting sustainable patterns of production and consumption, and the protection of the environment and health.

¹⁸ Act of 28/01/1999 concerning guarantees that substances and preparations must give for the health and safety of workers, and their welfare.

¹⁹ Act of 9/02/1994 concerning consumer safety.

setting procedures, at Belgian and European levels. Particular attention will be devoted to standards concerning packaging, with a view to reducing the volume of and harm from wastes. In accordance with the government's declaration, the framework legislation on product standards for protection of health and the environment will be progressively extended to agricultural products, so that nutrition, health and the environment may be dealt with in a more explicitly integrated way. Lastly, in concert with the Regions, the government will deal with products whose use runs counter to Regional enactments and/or restricts the attainment of the aims of those enactments. Existing Royal Decrees concerning hazardous substances and preparations²⁰ will be consolidated so as to make their application and monitoring easier and better. This measure should meet obligations under international agreements (Conference on the North Sea, OSPAR Convention, European directives, etc. : see also the theme 'Marine Environment'). Enactment of this framework legislation will be supplemented by measures on information (see below, and paragraph above), by economic instruments, by a strengthening of inspection and by better institutional coordination (see below for these three elements).

139. - The second heading covers Federal responsibilities as concerns innovation. It will deal with product design and with the development of the upstream parts of the product life-cycle. Without prejudice to Regional responsibilities for these matters, the government will ensure that R&D is promoted by bringing together industries, research centres and government scientific institutions (OSTC) for measures deployed as part of the 'new economy' and by the mixed financing of pilot projects, joint ventures or venture capital promotions. Using instruments to be defined in agreement with the Regions, industry associations and the banking industry, it will do all it can to encourage strategies of "alliance for innovation", for the promotion and development of sustainable products (eco-product development), as well as for reconversion of those production chains adversely affected by product policy.

140. - The third heading will concern the creation of product databases. The product Guide Plan will incorporate suggestions for two information systems: the first will concern the creation, in conformity with European legislation, of a system for transparent information on the measures taken for removal of products which are hazardous in terms of safety, health or the environment (list of hazardous product names, descriptions, manufacturer's name, information for any consumer in possession of such products, alternative products, etc.); this information will be made accessible to the public. The second will concern the creation of a register of products put on the market: this will include a set of details, technical (known product features and characteristics) and economic (where produced, imported, etc.); again, this may be consulted by anyone.

141. - The fourth heading concerns product taxation. In this domain, the government will be supporting, at European level, a reduction in VAT rates on those products bearing environmental and ethical labels, in order to compensate for their (usually) higher price. At the same time it will be re-examining, jointly with the Regions, the legal framework concerning eco-taxes, and reforming it as soon as possible so that the aims of the legislation may be more successfully achieved.

142. - The fifth heading will consist of improving and strengthening the monitoring systems and sanctions which are to guarantee compliance with product standards legislation²¹, not least the accuracy of labels. More attention will be paid to labels as a whole, and in particular to the supervision of energy consumption labels. So far as food products are concerned, here it is the Federal Agency for Food Safety which will have the task of monitoring all food throughout the food production chain. Belgium will support the creation of a European Agency

²⁰ Royal Decree of 11/01/1993 regulating classification, packaging and labelling of hazardous preparations to be marketed or used, Royal Decree of 24/05/1982 regulating the sale of substances liable to be hazardous for humans and their environment, Royal Decree of 19/03/1981 regulating classification, packaging and labelling of hazardous preparations to be marketed or used, and Art 723 (ii) of the General regulations for workers' protection.

²¹ The above Acts, and also the Act of 24/01/1977 concerning the protection of consumer health in relation to foodstuffs and other products and the Act of 14/07/1991 on commercial practices, information and protection of the consumer, etc.

for supervision of food safety in member states. For the other products which come under the framework legislation referred to above, and in particular for chemical products, it will be necessary to follow the OECD's recommendations (made in the course of an examination of Belgium's environmental performance) and reorganise and reinforce the inspectorates charged with supervising compliance with regulations concerning the putting of chemical products on the market, and at the same time ensure a proper coordination with the environmental inspectorates. As in the case of food safety, a way will be found to ensure coordination among all authorities monitoring the safety of consumption and application of chemical products.

143. - The sixth heading concerns the strengthening of institutional coordination for implementing the four preceding headings effectively. The Federal Government will have the task of improving coordination with the Regions and with the European Union so as to guarantee the development of an integrated product policy. Belgium will actively support the work of the European Commission concerning an integrated product policy, and will make its Presidency of the EU, in the second half of 2001, the occasion for promoting this policy. Also, within the Federal Government, certain departments will be somewhat reoriented, and interdepartmental cooperation strengthened, so as to meet the objectives referred to above. In this, the role and activities of the Belgian Standards Institution will be re-examined.

144. This product policy also provides an essential tool for a strategy of sustainable development in the domains of energy, transport, agriculture and health (see the respective themes).

145. In accordance with the government agreement, the government will define a 'social' label based on respect for the basic Conventions of the International Labour Organisation throughout the life cycle of products, and will support initiatives concerning fairer trade. It will very shortly adopt the draft legislation which would make violation of any of the basic rights of Belgian citizens abroad an offence in Belgian law wherever committed (extraterritoriality), such basic rights being those defined in the Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (see part 3, Development Cooperation). These two measures will contribute to the social strand of this product policy. Lastly, as the Plan for youth employment comes into operation it will also contribute to the objective of social integration and sustainable development which products policy also aims at (cf. also Part 4).

Implementation of the Plan

146. The institutions involved in the implementation of a products policy are the same as those involved in the information, education and public awareness policy (see above). The Federal Environment Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment will organise the debates and coordinate the initiatives.

147. Within the CIDD Working Group on "changing patterns of consumption" already mentioned above, there will be a group specifically working on product policy. For the moment, a products Guide Plan is in the process of being worked out within the Federal Department of the Environment, in application of the Act of 21 December 1998 (see above); this plan will be presented by September 2001.

c. Policy of consumption in public bodies

Context

148. Public bodies also put pressure on environmental and human resources through their everyday activities. They use natural resources (water, energy, etc.); they buy consumer

products such as paper, coffee, etc.; they employ people - and so on. The credibility of public authorities' decisions about sustainable development requires that they set an example, by having as small an environmental and social impact as possible, and so make their contribution to the strategic objectives of this Plan. For this, they have three levers available: environmental management (consumption of non-renewable resources and production of waste), the purchasing of products, and the way they conduct the public tendering [government procurement] of services and works.

149. - Environmental management: so far, there have been just a few pilot schemes of good environmental management carried out by public bodies. These have demonstrated what can be done to improve official environmental management; and there is confirmation of this also from experiments abroad. But these pilot schemes remain few and far between, and as a general rule consumption of water and energy, and production of waste, are still too high. What is more, this excessive consumption of resources and this over-production of waste by public bodies lead to higher expenses than necessary.

150. - Product purchasing: public bodies must also set an example in purchasing products that are environment-friendly and manufactured under conditions which respect human dignity. The effective application of the basic ILO Conventions may in fact be supported by consumption choices. As it is now, only a few experiments have been made in purchasing environmentally-friendly products, and the majority of products bought have not been chosen with regard to compliance with the basic ILO Conventions concerning workers' rights in the manufacturing process.

151. - Invitations to tender in the public market for services or works: in these invitations, public bodies can encourage the introduction of environmental clauses and social clauses obliging those submitting tenders to employ or train certain categories of job seekers. At present, the majority of public tenders do not contain this type of clause. There is moreover a lack of experience in having such clauses in public tender contracts.

Measures

152. The government will take the following measures.

153. To improve environmental management:

154. - engagement of specialists in environmental matters and environmental audits. Each Ministry (and this includes Federal organs under the direct authority of the Government and public enterprises which are autonomous so far as the drawing up of management contracts is concerned) will engage, or internally appoint, at least one environmental officer. This coordinator will have the assistance of one or more environmental advisers, in-house or external, depending on the size of the Ministry. The remuneration of the environmental officer will be accounted for in the Ministry budget from 2001 onwards. The [Public] Corporation for Public Buildings will appoint three assistants for updating the 1983 energy audit and making use of the raw data from 1990-1998 on consumption of energy in all government buildings. Lastly, three environmental advisers will be engaged in a single coordination unit in the Federal Environment Department under the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment, to coordinate and network the activities of each Ministry. External energy audits will be carried out alongside this work and piloted by the Federal Agency for Public Buildings .

155. - the setting up of performance indicator tables ["control panels"] Each Ministry will be required to include, as an appendix to its annual report to the CIDD, a performance indicator table covering water, energy and waste, with particular attention to waste paper. This performance indicator table will make it possible, among other things, to follow changes in consumption levels. It will also include a review of spending and money savings in these

fields. All these data will be forwarded to the three environmental advisers of the coordination unit, who will monitor them as a whole, and report. These performance indicator tables will be useful in training civil servants and making them more environmentally aware. The government will also take measures to encourage Ministries, public bodies and autonomous public enterprises to establish a Plan for Transport in 2001, and the results of these, also, will be set out in their performance indicator tables. By 2003, each Ministry, public body and autonomous public enterprise will be expected to have furnished itself with such a Plan.

156. - incentives. Effective monitoring, better follow-up, and certain kinds of investments will enable the consumption of energy and water to be lowered. Over a five-year period, a financial saving should be achieved;

157. - environmental management system. Ministerial offices and Federal bodies taken all together, as well as the institutions answerable to them, will install a system of environmental management. The government will establish, by June 2001, an environmental charter based on the Regional charters and on internationally recognised systems such as the EMA²² and ISO 14000²³. The administrations will have the choice of committing themselves on a voluntary basis to either a Regional charter, the Federal charter, or an internationally certified system (EMA, ISO 14000). These commitments will be made before 2002.

158. In order to promote the purchasing of products (office supplies, maintenance products, food and drink) which are more environment-friendly and manufactured under employment conditions which respect human dignity, the Minister with responsibilities concerning sustainable development will issue a circular, jointly with the other government members concerned: there is also expected to be collaboration with the Prime Minister's Department. This circular will contain a set of directives on products that are to be sourced keeping their impact on the environment, and on human resources, in mind. A model checklist will be drawn up by the Federal Purchasing Bureau. It will be available to all public bodies, so that no problem may arise in connection with public tendering legislation: there will be collaboration with the Prime Minister's Department. All new building maintenance contracts (tenders for services) agreed by official bodies will contain clauses providing for the use of products complying with the directives of this circular. The circular will be drawn up on a scientific basis, based on a comparison of human and environmental effects of these products with those of alternative products, taking entire life-cycles into account. Expert advice for this purpose will be sought from the industries concerned.

159. In order to combat social exclusion through public tenders for works and services, the Federal authorities undertake to examine the legal possibility of introducing social clauses in the public tendering process, and will draw up a proposal. The Federal Agency for Public Buildings will study ways of reducing pollution caused during execution of works tenders by means of adding environmental clauses in the specifications. It will draft, by June 2001, an analysis of the situation, the objectives in view, the measures to be taken, and the means to be deployed. .

Implementation of the Plan

160. All Ministries are concerned in this theme. However, the Federal Agency for Public Buildings, the Federal Purchasing Bureau, the Prime Minister's Department, the Federal Environment Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment, and the Ministry of Employment and Labour must perform specific functions, in terms both of content and of coordination.

161. Here again the CIDD will be playing an active role, through its 'greening' Working Group. This Working Group will see to following up this Action Plan, and will provide assistance to

²² Eco-Management and Audit Scheme

²³ International Standard Organisation. ISO 14000 is an international standard for environmental management defined by the ISO.

the coordination unit of the Federal Environment Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment, which has the task of managing information concerning public bodies' consumption of water and energy, and production of waste.

162. The implementation of the measures to improve environmental management will begin from 2001. All these measures will have come into force by 2002. In the case of measures concerning public tendering, these will be tested in 2001, in order to determine more precise objectives for 2002.

2. Action on poverty and social exclusion - over-indebtedness – environmental health

163. The combating of poverty and promotion of health are social policies. Their integration in a policy of sustainable development emphasises their links with the economic and environmental themes marked for attention in this Plan. The themes dealt with in the last section have a great influence on the form which our development takes: they may be regarded as guiding forces for it. Alongside effects which are undeniably beneficial, these forces also create considerable social and ecological stresses on our society. The present part brings out this aspect in detail.

164. It deals with policy for combating poverty, policy for reducing over-indebtedness and policy on environmental health, in that order: but the choice of these is not meant to imply that these themes are the only social consequences of sustainable development. Alongside policies specifically aimed at these themes, a wider social policy, carried out with a concern for sustainable development, is still necessary under the principles set out in the first part.

165. As proclaimed by the fifth principle of the Rio Declaration, the eradication of poverty is a precondition for a policy of sustainable development: this applies in Belgium as much as anywhere. In spite of a particularly efficient and effective system of social security, there are still people in situations of poverty in Belgium. A specific policy of combating poverty therefore remains indispensable, and must be based on the following structural approach: as many people as possible must be encouraged to participate in work, which remains the best guarantee of an income and a full place in our society; the other prevention mechanisms,



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Despite a particularly effective and efficient social security system poverty situations still occur in Belgium

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such as social security, must be reinforced, social inequalities must be reduced; working income and basic rights must be guaranteed, and those who are living in situations of poverty or insecurity must be able to take part in politics, via their organisations and solidarity structures. For this, it is important to ensure that those who are living in situations of poverty or insecurity do not become the victims of other political decisions and measures, including those of other parts of this Plan. Where this problem is liable to arise, solutions should be sought which accord with the principles expressed.

166. The chapter devoted to over-indebtedness establishes the link between (combating) poverty and consumption patterns (as dealt with in the last chapter). These consumption patterns have a great influence on, and form part of, the lifestyles which are generally accepted in our society. Those who live in poverty are excluded from these lifestyles. Going into debt may provide one way of getting hold of the goods and services which go with these lifestyles. It is often observed that the availability of certain consumer goods - whether or not supported by advertising - is the main reason for recourse to credit, with the risk of over-indebtedness when income turns out to be insufficient. Undisciplined budgeting leads to situations of poverty.

167. The choice of products consumed, and full understanding and control over their production methods can have an influence on health, both at work and in private life. The chapter devoted to the links between health and environment develops this aspect. The recent dioxin crisis shocked the Belgian population and aroused strong calls for a proper environmental health policy. It is not so widely appreciated that risks to health may also be caused by environmental factors such as the presence of pesticides in reservoirs of drinking water, the solvent fumes from certain paints used in the home, and the presence of pollutants in the atmosphere (such as ozone), including those given off in fuel combustion or by industrial processes. These links between health and environment are made worse by conditions of poverty. Firstly, the poorer people are, the less opportunity they have of escaping pollutants (unhealthy homes sited in industrial districts, cheaper food, etc.²⁴). It is the poorer groups in the population which contain, proportionally, the most smokers, the most people who do no sport, the most people with unbalanced diets, etc.²⁵. This recalls the importance of prevention and the need to modify consumption and production patterns. Secondly, those who are living in situations of poverty or insecurity do not always have the (financial) ability to pay attention to the interaction between health and environment. Despite the merits of the Belgian social security and health care systems, it is still necessary to make the cost of consulting a doctor, of following a course of treatment and paying for necessary medicines remain within the reach of those who are living in situations of poverty or insecurity.

168. This set of links between patterns of consumption, conditions at work, poverty and health is tackled in depth by the policies introduced below.

169. The overall burden on the Belgian economy is one of the heaviest in Europe; the firm purpose is to reduce this total burden. The measures which enable these objectives to be obtained must not, accordingly, be such as to increase this overall burden.

24 Indoor air quality also plays an important role, and the roles of house dust mite allergy, humidity or moulds, and cockroaches have been well established. Outdoor air pollutants (such as particulates, ozone and sulfur dioxide) may exacerbate asthma, and children living along busy roads have increased rates of respiratory symptoms and declined lung function. WHO 1999 Children's Health and the Environment. <http://www.who.dk/london99/CHILDREN02e.htm>
25 ISP (1998). Health Enquiry, Belgium 1997. Scientific Institute for Public Health. <http://www.iph.fgov.be/epidemo/epifr/index000.htm> (26/10/1999).

2.1. Policy for combating poverty and social exclusion

2.1.1. Present situation

170. Poverty is a combination of exclusions extending to all the elements making up a life consistent with human dignity: income, education, work, diet, health, mobility, rights, etc. The term "poverty" is used where people are excluded from all these domains. Poverty is a unique form of social exclusion in that it involves all these domains. It may become permanently entrenched, and then restricts the opportunity of those least well off for taking responsibilities for themselves in the short term. "Social exclusion" refers rather to exclusion from one particular domain, such as, for instance, exclusion from the labour market or from health care. Those living in a precarious economic situation constantly run the risk of tipping into a condition of poverty.

171. The very existence of poverty is in the first place a negation of generally accepted ethical principles. And in the second place, it is incompatible with sustainable development. The "needs", and in particular the essential needs of the least well off form a key concept for sustainable development policy. But a policy of sustainable development goes beyond the meeting of essential needs. As was established in the last Part, it also requires the achieving of sustainable patterns of consumption for all, including those who are living in poverty or precarious conditions. The point of such a policy is to guarantee to everyone all the aspects of a life consistent with human dignity. It strives to alter social, economic and ecological tendencies where they are not sustainable.

172. Poverty may result from various factors. It is indeed involved in various aspects of life, and there are numerous, mutually interdependent links among its causes. Instead of pointing to one or more 'main' causes of poverty, this Plan proposes measures aimed at preventing situations of poverty in all domains. This means that all political, social and economic measures must be directed at the prevention of poverty, or at least must avoid increasing it.

173. There are still situations of poverty and of social exclusion in Belgium. There is even a widening of the social rift between families enjoying a working income and those which only have some kind of benefit to replace one. What is worse, a new rift is in danger of making its appearance - or has already appeared - within the group of those with a working income: the rift between one-income families, where only one family member is earning, and families that have more than one income source. The social categories most in danger of poverty or precarious situations are those where the head of the household is young, a woman, isolated, with little education/training, of non-EU nationality, out of work or incapacitated or handicapped; low-income, single-person or single-income households, and some among the old. The policy domains listed above have to pay particular attention to these groups.

174. The situation remains problematical. The number of those on guaranteed minimum income benefit has risen, over the decade of the 1990s, by some 50,000 to over 82,000²⁶ and it is thought that in 1997, 7.7% of all households and 6.4% of individuals living in Belgium were poor²⁷. This development is also a consequence of lowering the age of majority from 21 to 18 years, and the independence that has come to some young people as a result. Precarious economic situations are becoming more and more widespread. These findings constitute a challenge for a society like ours which has achieved much in the way of social and economic progress²⁸, which has a high degree of social protection through its social

26 Social Assistance Administration, Budget, Statistical and Accounting Division.

27 For calculation of the percentage, the EU's definition has been used: the poverty borderline is taken as 50% of average income. Families with income below this limit are regarded as poor. (Cantillon B. et al. (1999). Sociale indicatoren 1976-1997, Antwerp: CSB).

28 At international level, Belgium comes fifth in the ranking by the UNDP index of human development (UNDP(1999). Human Development Report. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press).

security system²⁹ and which guarantees certain rights under its Constitution, including the right to live a life consistent with human dignity³⁰.

2.1.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objective

175. The Federal Government regards the total elimination of poverty as an ultimate goal. This ultimate goal must, like the others (see paragraph 771), be translated urgently into quantified targets for the progressive reduction of poverty. These intermediate objectives are to be reached in the next ten years, at the very most. The government will continue to engage, as it has for a number of years, in dialogue with organisations that give the poor a voice, and will adopt these quantified targets accordingly. Within the framework of a strategy designed to lead to a reduction in poverty, it wishes to see these quantified targets enshrined in European legislation before the end of 2001, the date on which the Belgian presidency of the EU ends.

b. Policies and measures

176. In view of the multidimensional nature of poverty, all policy domains have a facet linked with the policy for combating poverty. The strategic measures presented below are grouped by subject field, and each has a greater or lesser impact on opportunities for living a life consistent with human dignity and with sustainable development. The General Report on Poverty is the main source of inspiration for this section. All these measures must contribute to the achieving of the quantified intermediate objectives mentioned above.

177. Social security fulfils a particular function in this respect. It is based on the principle of solidarity between and within generations. It protects the population against a series of social dangers. If it were not for the social security system, situations of poverty and of precarious finances would be much more widespread. For this reason the resources currently available to social security will remain guaranteed, even though new social needs are being taken into account.

178. It is necessary, therefore, as envisaged in the Stability Programme, to aim for a budget surplus in order to permit an accelerated redemption of public debt. In this way it will be possible to deal with demographic changes, and ensure a lasting and healthy basis for Belgian public finance.

179. There has not been, up till now, any political instrument of a "macro-socioeconomic" nature that enables us to see whether this or that measure undertaken has tended towards the elimination of poverty and improvement of the quality of life of all (two objectives of a policy of sustainable development). For this reason the government intends to apply itself over the next three years to the development of such an instrument. It will request that the necessary studies be carried out by the appropriate bodies. Associations speaking for the poor will be involved in this.

180. The achievement of intermediate objectives will be assessed by means of indicators applying to poverty in each of its aspects, as listed immediately below and in the other Parts of this Plan. These indicators include, but are not limited to: - the number of those on guaranteed minimum income benefit, the number of single-parent families, the unemployment rate (and in particular the rate of long-term unemployed), the rate of indebtedness (see the chapter on over-indebtedness, below), household income distribution,

²⁹ Were it not for social security, some 42% of households in Belgium would be "poor" (European Commission (1998). Social protection in Europe 1997. European publications offices).

³⁰ See Articles 23 and 24, §3 of the Constitution.

the functional literacy rate, health indicators, the number of legal aid cases³¹. All quantitative indicators must be interpreted in their context. As already mentioned, associations speaking for the poor will be taking part in this process, so that qualitative indicators will also be available. Particular attention will be given to the budget allocated to minimum income benefit and to the attendant measures for those who depend on this benefit.

181. Current research on "benchmarking" and performance evaluation will be associated with this process.

182. The Federal Government wishes to take the measures listed below as an integrated programme, and in the light of the conclusions of the Lisbon meeting of the European Council, and will work within the Interministerial Conference on Social Integration, while respecting the jurisdictions of Regional, Community and local authorities, in a spirit of cooperation with these authorities, and on the basis of a dialogue with organisations speaking for the poor.

183. The Federal Government also wishes to involve, among other organisations, those of women, those concerned with families, those which defend tenants' rights, and the trade unions.

Work and a decent income

184. Increasing work opportunities by training, lowering the cost of labour, and the creation of a climate which encourages large-scale employment-generating investments are the main levers of a poverty prevention policy. The Federal Government will commission a study examining how adequately low working incomes and benefit levels prevent the situations of poverty and of precarious finance, and will be formulating proposals which take account of the principles listed at the opening of this Plan. A country which means to have an active social dimension must invest in people, in entrepreneurship, in training and in employment, for all segments of the population and above all for the young, so that its people may benefit from the social surplus value which work generates, and not only from social benefits.

185. The Federal Government wishes to take the following measures during the time scale of the Plan:

186. – to commission a study of the possibility of individualizing all personal taxes and benefits for natural persons, in a context of income inequalities;

187. - to draw up a proposal, in collaboration with the employers' and workers' representatives, of measures concerning redistribution of work, and measures to make it easier to combine family and employment (as well as other) responsibilities and leisure time, by a reduction in hours spent working, under the conditions set out in the government agreement;

188. - to reduce fiscal burdens on employment, especially that of unskilled labour, and to increase the lowest incomes by fiscal and quasi-fiscal means, so as to encourage more employment of the most vulnerable groups. The government will assess how far this reduction of tax burden leads to effective job creation: it will in any case see to it that, in the event of a lowering of social security contributions, alternative means of finance are guaranteed, so that benefits to the most disadvantaged citizens are maintained. Over the period of the Plan, the government will assess all plans for employment with the aim of encouraging the reintegration of the long-term unemployed, those on minimum income benefit and equivalents, and those at risk of falling into one of these categories;

31 See, inter alia, the indicators shown in the Federal Report on Sustainable Development. Federal Planning Bureau (1999). *Sur la voie d'un développement durable? ["On course for Sustainable Development?"]* First Federal Report on Sustainable Development. Brussels: Federal Planning Bureau p.149.

189. - developing the Local Employment Agencies (ALEs) in the direction of a system of (re)integration of these social categories. The emphasis will be on the social economy in all its aspects, and on 'kick-start' projects both in the profit-making and the non-profit-making sectors. Complementary operation of all sorts of paid employment is the aim. To this end, the legal possibility of introducing social clauses in the award of public contracts will be investigated;

190. - seeing to it that the sanctions and suspensions of benefits laid down in regulations concerning unemployment are not counterproductive, leading to the confining of those concerned in a situation of poverty, or confirming their social exclusion. The government will raise the question of proper attendant services for the people concerned within the framework of the interministerial conference on employment;

191. - gradually increasing low pensions in order to guarantee everyone adequate means of existence, and regularly adapting pensions in welfare terms. In view of demographic changes, the Federal Government will give priority to the viability of the statutory pension system. The overall management of debt reduction is the best guarantee of this.

192. In view of coming demographic developments, the government will take the necessary measures to encourage the development of collective capital funding systems, in accordance with the government agreement;

193. - a study of how far it is possible, by means of tax reductions or the introduction of new arrangements for 'service cheques', to pay for domestic services and personal services usually provided under the 'black' economy. From 1999 onwards, income slices for personal income tax purposes will be re-indexed, and the emergency supplementary contribution will be eliminated by degrees. There will also be a general review of personal taxation, and in this respect there will be a study of fiscal measures for the coverage of certain specific costs for taxpayers with low incomes.

Health

194. It is essential to guarantee health care for the least well off and those with low incomes. Particular attention will be given to the problems these people - pensioners, unemployed, the chronic sick and handicapped among them - report, in terms of the accessibility of health care. The Federal Government will also take measures of a preventive kind, as envisaged in the chapter 'Health and environment'; for as well as guaranteeing the accessibility of health care, the Federal Government is firmly of the opinion that measures must be taken about dietary and lifestyle habits for health (including children's habits) and about information campaigns on this subject, so that preventive action is taken. The Federal Government will draft proposals on this subject, in collaboration with Communities, with the creation of operational bodies with integrated programmes each having a specific, clearly defined objective.

195. To ensure financial accessibility of health care to all, in particular the chronic sick, the government will be analysing the structure of health care costs for these categories of patients. It will review the possibility of using proof of low income entitlement in the calculation of the patient's charge for subsidised prescriptions, and for reducing the amount charged to the chronic sick. The quality of health care that the chronic sick receive will be improved; numbers of particular treatments will be increased, and financial thresholds abolished

196. The Federal Government wishes a careful watch to be kept to make sure that the beneficial consequences of extending the Widows, Invalids, Pensioners and Orphans regime (VIPO) are not watered down by price rises combined with the non-reimbursement of medical costs and prescriptions. The Federal Government will stimulate the use of generic medicines by means of incentive measures. Because of the great number of questions raised about free

health care for certain categories of people, the government will make a study of this problem.

197. The Federal Government will initiate a process of joint deliberation with Communities concerning the design of an “independence insurance” scheme.

Housing

198. Availability of proper housing is something closely linked with many aspects of life: income, health, etc. Those with low incomes have more difficulty gaining access to such housing, above all in certain city districts, despite this being one of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution. But problems may also be reported in the more rural regions, in the form of difficulties of access to collective infrastructure (for instance, public transport). For this reason, the Federal Government has decided to take measures, in collaboration with the Regions, to improve the viability of these zones, and to strengthen the local economic and social fabric, not least by ensuring access to subsidised housing. On this matter there is a need for differentiation within a policy for combating poverty, so that it can be organised around the specific problems of each (urban) district or rural sub-region.

199. While not interfering with Regional matters, and in the framework of the interministerial conference on social integration, the Federal Government will give particular attention to: (i) small dwelling units; (ii) social housing associations; (iii) housing allocation systems; (iv) the use of renovation grants; (v) ownership access; (vi) eviction procedures; (vii) those living in camps and caravans; (viii) the homeless; (ix) access for the handicapped and old people to public places and buildings; (x) basic supplies of water, gas and electricity, of particular importance within the framework of liberalisation of these various markets. Further, the government will make a start on the evaluation of neighbourhood watch schemes, with a view to improving the quality of life and without any implication or assumption that there is a necessary link between poverty and criminality.

200. Without interfering with Regional matters, and in the framework of the interministerial conference on social integration, the Federal Government will commission an examination of the scope for improving basic equipment and collective provision in all buildings operated by the CPAS, with a view to rational use of natural resources and an improvement in the viability of these buildings and dwellings. This renovation will be an ideal opportunity for the employment of marginalised groups. In collaboration with employers' and workers' representatives, the Federal Government will examine the scope for launching this kind of project in the social [non-profit-making] sector of the economy and supporting them by means of tax measures and various grants, including renovation grants, without these projects competing unfairly with the conventional industry. In addition, the Federal Government will develop, jointly with the Regions, a system to guarantee that housing, whether designed for the social or the conventional rented markets, has energy-saving equipment and features that comply with minimum requirements in terms of safety, security and hygiene.

The right to a family

201. The Federal Government will examine in what circumstances the status of head of family can be maintained when a child is placed in care.

202. Within the framework of the general reform of personal taxation, which has already been referred to, the government will examine how far dependent child tax allowances may be extended into a tax credit system. Employers' and workers' representatives and the associations speaking on behalf of the poor will be closely associated with this.

Social services

203. One necessary condition for social services accessible to all is that the administrative

documents involved should be readily understood by everyone. The Federal Government will see to the simplification of various documents: those concerning the CPAS, the exercise of rights, the making available to the homeless of an address for reference, and bailiffs' procedures. Lastly, all the documents pertaining to persons living in the German-speaking Community must be available in a German version. Those who are not familiar with any of the three national languages, but nevertheless have rights of a general order to insist on, must have the opportunity to exercise those rights, in collaboration with the organisations which defend their interests, and in compliance with the legislation on language. The government will also commission a report on the obstacles, if any, in the way of access to CPAS and of the exercise of rights.

204. In order to ensure rights to social services and make it easier to handle social assistance cases, the Federal Government will take measures to arrange for the CPAS to be linked with the information network of the Social Security system.

Education

205. Education is in principle free, and all children must be accepted, regardless of their social origins. In order to guarantee this to the least well off, the government will be inviting Communities to take measures enabling parents and the young to take more part in school life; and will ensure full compliance with the list of those school supplies and out-of-school activities that parents may not be asked to provide a financial contribution for.

206. The government will recommend to the Communities that they look into the desirability of a system for funding under which necessary supplies would be available to all pupils, and all could take part in the various activities organised.

207. The Federal Government recognises the primordial importance of suitable attention for pupils who have, or may develop, learning difficulties. On this, it will request the Communities to examine what measures could be taken.

208. Lastly, the Federal Government will ask the Communities to look into the possibility of introducing Human Rights as a subject in all school curricula, as well as teaching about sustainable development.

Culture

209. Culture is that whole domain of existence in which human beings express their values and thoughts, and communicate with each other. It is what allows individuals to take part in the building of society as well as to realise their full potential. All organisations which are active in the social world have an important role to play here. For this reason, the Federal Government proposes to conduct a review of current regulations concerning access to culture and to the means of communication and information, and to coordinate the regulations governing "culture vouchers" and/or any other initiative which leads in the same direction. The Federal Government will also be drafting a charter for artists. Culture must be extended to include participation in social life: this is even more important in the case of those who are presently marginalised.

Justice

210. The rights which the Constitution guarantees belong to everyone. With the aim of enabling all, and in particular those who live on the margins of society, to exercise their rights, the Federal Government will order the relevant offices to examine the reasons for the increase in the number of legal aid cases and to make suggestions with a view to increasing the budget devoted to legal aid in the lower courts. The Federal Government will take

measures to clarify the role of "houses of justice" vis-à-vis the CPAS, and thus ensure better coordination between them, as well as seeing that the arrangements for aid to victims are extended. Here, the priority objectives are to simplify the procedure and improve access to justice. Lastly, the Federal Government will develop measures for the training of legal professionals so far as the problems involving children in care are concerned.

c. Implementation of the Plan

211. As has already been mentioned, combating poverty is a matter that affects the whole of society. All government departments, all public services and all institutions can take measures in their field of action which contribute to the prevention of poverty or effective remedies for it. This is therefore a common, but differentiated responsibility. So far as concerns the implementation of the measures of this Plan, some specific responsibilities may be established.

212. The bodies primarily responsible for the implementation of this Plan are:

213. - the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment, Social Integration Office, Poverty unit;

214. - the Division for combating poverty, insecurity and social exclusion, established under a cooperation agreement with a brief to extend dialogue with associations which speak for the poor and to publish a report every two years on developments in poverty and social exclusion, and the executive committee and steering group for this Division. This biennial report will also be an important part of the follow-up measures proposed here, and for subsequent plans concerning sustainable development;

215. - the relevant Regional and Community institutions;

216. - the Public Social Assistance Centres;

217. - the associations which speak for the poor.

218. The government suggests that the CIDD should set up a Poverty Working Group with a brief of watching over progress under this Outline Plan, in collaboration with the divisions involved in the cooperation agreement made between the Federal Government, Communities and Regions concerning continuity of policy concerning poverty³², for this is one of the key instruments of the policy for combating poverty and social exclusion. This Working Group would be supported by a number of technical units. One of these units would work on the development of a "macro-socioeconomic" policy instrument to enable measures taken to be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in diminishing poverty. The creation of a Poverty Working Group within the CIDD must fit in with other developments in the field (e.g. the greater independence of the Division for combating poverty, insecurity and social exclusion, the Urban Policy Unit...).

³² Cooperation Agreement signed Brussels, 5 May 1998. Act of 27 January 1999.

2.2. Policy for reducing over-indebtedness

2.2.1. Present situation

219. Systems of credit (mortgage loans, consumer credit, credit cards, etc.) are key mechanisms now in the functioning of our society. They are an efficient means of development, partly because they facilitate access to consumption and investment.

220. . In recent years, fiercer and fiercer competition has led lenders to make more and more enticing offers, to develop various more flexible credit formulas, some of which are not subject to regulation (for instance, bank overdrafts for less than 50,000 BEF not subject to the Consumer Credit Act), to distinguish different segments of their clientele, and to target certain categories, in particular the young and low-income households. The development of these techniques has led to more recourse to credit. Overall credit for consumption almost doubled in money terms between 1985 and 1997³³. In 1998, the ratio of credit to total household income was as high as 27%³⁴ . Even at this level, the rate of indebtedness of Belgian households is still low, by comparison with other EU Member States.

221. Nevertheless, household budget surveys show that the half of Belgian households with the lowest incomes had positive savings at the end of the 1970s, whereas today this half lives on credit (has negative savings)³⁵. Indebtedness, moreover, is on average greater among the quarter of households with the lowest incomes: in 1998 it reached a level of 48% of their income³⁶. What is more, these households are generally subject to dearer terms of credit. Right from the start, then, they are in a more difficult and more fragile financial situation.

222. Abuse of credit mechanisms, as much by those in the credit industry as by consumers, and recent developments in the social and economic climate have resulted in certain households becoming "over-indebted". The term applies to those who are not in a position to pay their debts currently due or as they fall due, whatever the level of debt, in a sustainable fashion³⁷. In 1998, the number of people with payment difficulties was as high as 368,109³⁸, and the number of credit contracts concerned was 477,807: these figures were up by 26% and 56% over those for 1992. Over-indebted households have the following typical profile: total net monthly income per household below 60,000 BEF, unemployed, single-person or single-parent household, little education³⁹. These households usually have a number of debts: not only bank debts, but also outstanding tax, health care bills, rent, water, gas and electricity payments, telephone bills, etc. It should be noted that debts related to certain essential needs are on the increase: outstanding gas and electricity bills have doubled since 1993⁴⁰, and that there are people with very low incomes (those, for instance, on income support) who go into debt in order to meet their basic everyday needs.

223. From such a situation it is only a small step to borrowing in order to pay off other debts. A snowball effect of personal indebtedness takes hold, and these households' financial situation becomes unsustainable. Situations of over-indebtedness, then, are often the source of social exclusion. Combating over-indebtedness thus works towards the objective of combating social exclusion, and towards that of establishing sustainable consumption patterns. Budget management advice can prove an effective form of help.

33 Fraselle N. (1998). Credit, indebtedness et over-indebtedness of households. Weekly gazette n°1610. Brussels: CRISP.

34 Ibidem. Fraselle N. (1998).

35 INS. Household budget survey.

36 Ibidem. Fraselle N. (1998).

37 Ibidem. Fraselle N. (1998).

38 Number of individuals recorded at the Personal Credit Central Registry.

39 Credit and Indebtedness Observation Unit (1998). Compendium of statistics on consumption, credit and indebtedness of individuals. Louvain-La-Neuve.

40 Vranken J., Geldof D., Van Menxel G. (1998). Armoede en Sociale Uitsluiting Jaarboek 1998. p.93. Leuven: Acco.

2.2.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objective

224. The government is committed to the progressive elimination of over-indebtedness. Between now and 2003, it proposes to adopt a strategic objective of reducing recorded credit defaults by at least 10% (number of persons recorded at the Personal Credit Central Registry [of defaulters]).

225. This objective of reducing over-indebtedness also needs assessment by use of a number of other indicators, such as the level of wage attachment orders, the total amount of outstanding payments for certain essential needs (gas, electricity, water, health care, food, etc.), the ratio of debt to income, etc.

b. Policies and measures

226. In order to attain this objective, the government will take both preventive measures and remedial ones.

Preventive measures

227. - Controls on various kinds of advertising carried on by the credit industry will be tightened so as to prevent and penalise misleading, unfair, and exploitative advertisements, and to make sure that consumers are better informed. These controls will be extended to certain forms of advertising which give the impression that money is easy to come by (lotteries, scratch cards). These measures will be taken, inter alia, through the coming into force during 2000 of a draft amendment intended to extend the Act of 14 July 1991 on commercial practices.

228. - Within the framework of the measures for public awareness, training and education in the section above on sustainable consumption, and jointly with the Regions and Communities, the government will make sure that the themes of over-indebtedness and money management are included in educational courses both for children and for adults, and in the public awareness campaigns conducted by associations. In the framework of its support for debt mediation services (see paragraph 234), it will propose that these services also provide advice to households wanting to take out credit.

229. - In accordance with the government's declaration, a Positive Credit Central Registry will be set up and working during 2002. Subject to respect for personal privacy, this registry will gather, centralise and monitor information concerning credit. Credit forms will have to consult this data bank before every credit is authorised.

230. - The setting up of a positive registry should be accompanied by the adoption of self-supervising standards on the part of credit firms concerning credit to low-income households, in such a way that their debt remains within levels they can bear and does not compromise their ability to deal with irreducible expenditures. Moreover, the government will request that the matter of access to credit and financial services is included in the study it will be commissioning on minimum supplies of water, energy and other basic needs (see the chapter on Combating poverty, paragraph 199). In this context, the importance of learning and the taking of responsibility for one's own financial affairs should also be emphasised.

231. - The government will act to regulate debt recovery firms.

232. - Lastly, the government will commission, for 2001, a study on the possibility of prohibiting credit firms granting credit to those below a certain age. This study should draw

up specific proposals so that the government can take decisions on this subject during 2002.

Remedial measures

233. - There will continue to be regular monitoring of the working of the Act of 5 July 1998 concerning collective settlement of debts and the opportunity of sale by private contract of real property under repossession allowing the debtor, to pay his debts so far as possible in a way which guarantees him and his family a life consistent with human dignity. Jointly with the industry concerned, these evaluations will allow improvements in its functioning, keeping the primary objective of the Act, which is respect for human dignity. The monitoring will rely on a series of indicators. The government will also create a Fund for dealing with situations of over-indebtedness, the contributions to come from credit organisations.

234. - Jointly with the Regions, the Federal Government will support the Regional development of debt mediation services (training mediators, recognition of mediation services and their financing), and also public awareness of the existence of these services.

235. - The Civil Code rule which insists that repayment of interest or costs takes priority over that of principal will be modified so as to avoid the snowball effect of indebtedness.

236. For all of these preventive and remedial measures, since there are a number of aspects of the subject on which the Regions have authority, the government will make sure that it works jointly with them.

c. Implementation of the Plan

237. The governmental institutions concerned with combating poverty, plus on this matter the Personal Credit Central Registry (housed in the National Bank of Belgium) which deals with over-indebtedness.

238. One of the units of the Poverty Working Group which is to be created within the CIDD will work on the set of problems referred to above.

2.3. Environment/health policy

2.3.1. Present situation

239. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), environmental health covers those aspects of human health, including quality of life, which are determined by physical, biological, social and psychosocial factors of the environment. It includes the theoretical and practical aspects of evaluating, correcting, monitoring and prevention of environmental factors potentially liable to have an adverse affect on the health of present and future generations (not, therefore, infectious or genetic diseases). Questions of environmental health are one of the stakes of sustainable development policies, especially in the observance of the five principles defined in Part 1, since it requires better integration among policies for different economic sectors (industry, transport, agriculture...). Similarly, these are questions of a world-wide scope (pollution and radioactivity know no frontiers) which affect more than one generation (effects on foetal development, accumulations of toxic products reaching hazardous levels after a number of decades...). Lastly, scientific uncertainty is a central feature of this problem area which scientists, the public and the political authorities are now exploring. It follows that the precautionary principle must be applied, with care and deliberation.

240. On the one hand, the number of motor vehicles and their total mileage, as well as the number of air journeys, are all growing at such a rate that pollution is increasing despite the growing use of low-emission and quieter engines. Also, in comparison with other European countries, the level of pesticide use in Belgian agriculture is still high. On the other, allergies and respiratory complaints, pathologies linked to excessive noise, pollution, and the presence of toxic products in food or in the living environment constitute assaults on health in general and environmental health in particular. The hazards encountered by workers in the workplace are also numerous: risks of fatal or crippling accident, risks of occupational disease connected with physical, chemical or biological agents, risks to the foetuses of pregnant workers, risks to mental health due to stress and violence, for instance. Though the risks of classic occupational disease (poisoning, etc.) in the workplace have been much diminished by large-scale preventive measures, new complaints are appearing, and the risk management system must be made fully operational. The number of work-related accidents, above all serious accidents, remains fairly high due to inadequate integration of preventive measures. The various pollutants have cumulative or combined ["synergetic"] effects. It is therefore hard in most cases to define the effects of a [single] substance precisely. The precautionary principle must therefore be applied, for fear of coming, too late, to regret that some major health problem had not been foreseen. The rise in environmental diseases, moreover, is liable to place a heavier and heavier burden on the social security system. Deaths due to respiratory disease caused by vehicle pollution have now in fact overtaken deaths due to road traffic accidents⁴¹. The WHO has also reported a doubling every decade in the number of asthma sufferers in western Europe⁴². Environmental health factors are, of course, only one of the groups of factors that influence each individual's state of health: genetic endowment, economic circumstances and social status, the overall living conditions and the individual lifestyle, etc., also play their part.

241. These problems of environmental health cannot therefore be separated from social problems. The chapter on policy for combating poverty and social exclusion illustrates financial measures to be taken in order to improve the health of the most disadvantaged groups in the population. This present chapter emphasises the importance that must be accorded to surveillance and repair of the damage done by consumption among the least well off, especially their children and pregnant mothers: on the one hand, the least well off are more in contact with harmful environmental factors (inadequate housing, in polluted districts).

41 WHO (1999). Press background 0/99. Data from France, Switzerland and Austria.

42 Press release WHO 98/92.

On the other, they have fewer resources for treating the effects of these environmental factors.

242. It must therefore be emphasised that there is insufficient understanding of the interactions between, on the one hand, factors which influence each individual's state of environmental health (environment, heredity, social and economic situation) and, on the other, the effects of the hazards that have been listed. Such is the complexity of the corpus of problems involving health and the environment, and the number of different parameters that are of importance to health, that a cautious approach will be taken as we come to suspect and learn about the environmental influences on it.

2.3.2. Action Plan

a. strategic objectives

243. In accordance with the undertakings of Agenda 21, and despite scientific uncertainties that are a feature of the domain of environmental health, the government wishes to attain the following objectives:

244. - a lessening in causal and aggravating factors of respiratory diseases, including work-related ones;

245. - a lessening in causal and aggravating factors of allergic complaints, including work-related ones;

246. - a lessening in risk factors which favour the development of cancers and which are work- or environment-related.

247. - a lessening in causal and aggravating factors of work accidents, occupational diseases and other work-related ill-health.

248. These results must be visible in all strata of the population, and arise from a lessening of harmful environmental factors which are responsible for these forms of ill-health. They must be accompanied by an information and public awareness policy, which enables people to take appropriate decisions in their consumer behaviour and to deal with the risks connected with their work.

249. To evaluate progress towards these objectives, alternative indicators must be studied. These include, among indicators of stress, the atmospheric concentration of various pollutants (O₃, NO_x, CO, etc.); and, among response indicators, budgets must be allocated to research concerning environmental health, as a percentage of the budgets allocated to all health research. Other indicators of environmental health are also to be taken into account: but these are yet to be designed (see "Policies and measures", below).

b. Policies and measures

250. Belgium is committed, within the framework of the European region of the WHO, to drawing up a NEHAP (National Environmental Health Action Plan) to bring together the preoccupations concerning the environment and health, (including occupational health), on a reciprocal basis, in national policies and plans, in plans for economic sectors, legislation, and finance⁴³. The National Environmental Health Action Plan is not therefore a plan which covers all measures liable to contribute to the protection and promotion of the population's health and general welfare. It has rather the mission of providing a reference framework that

43 WHO (1999). Declaration of the Third Ministerial Conference on the Environment and Health. [http://www.who.dk/london99/WelcomeF.htm\(18/11/1999\)](http://www.who.dk/london99/WelcomeF.htm(18/11/1999)).



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Environmental health problems are often related to social problems

gathers together and combines all the actions which tend towards the prevention and elimination of hazards to environmental health. The structure of the National Environment and Health Action Plan rests on an inventory of environmental problems. The policies and measures of the National Environmental Health Action Plan will thus be linked with the Regions' Plans for the environment (and for sustainable development) . This Plan will among other things feature specific actions and measures concerning water, outside air, food, waste and ground decontamination, product policy and hazardous substances, ionising and non ionising radiation, noise, GMOs, the built environment (urban and rural), habitats and planning, and welfare at work. Measures and actions are also envisaged for individual sectors, in industry, energy, transport, agriculture, tourism and construction. These sector measures must of course fit in with the sustainable development of the sectors in question.

251. The government will see to it that in the course of 2000, the First Belgian National Environmental Health Action Plan is finalised by the Federal Authority, the Regions and Communities. This National Environmental Health Action Plan will emphasise the importance of research; of doctors' and paramedics' training in environmental health, including health in the work environment; of measures for individual economic sectors and industries, and of integrated action in order to attain the strategic objectives referred to above. The Federal Government, Regions and Communities will undertake all the implementation and application measures needed for fulfilment of the Environmental Health Plan.

Research

252. A major research effort is to be made jointly with the Regions, to acquire information relevant to the problems of environmental health, and the combined and cumulative effects of pollutants. The results of these researches must be readily accessible to the public. These researches must in any event lead to rapid and effective overall action to mitigate or eliminate the environmental causes of health problems and must be carried out by independent researchers⁴⁴. The various problems that have already been identified as present but not

⁴⁴ Research activities must comply with the ethical principles and codes of conduct internationally recognised as set out in para.31.1 of Agenda 21.

resolved must give rise without delay to measures of the same type. This part of the policy is to be carried out jointly, in particular with the federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (see Part 3). Socio-epidemiological methods will also be developed, and studies made, concerning pathogenic patterns (and not pathologies in the strict sense) in order to allow a better integration of the scientific facts on the one hand, and on the other of their perception by the public.

253. The government wishes the National Environment and Health Action Plan to follow these principal directions:

254. - continuation and planning of research, particularly on pathologies due to pollution, in the first instance that caused by motorised traffic, as well as pollution in the home (indoor pollution) especially in the housing of the least well-off,

255.- continuation of research into the health impact of hazardous substances in the food chain,

256.- research into the possible effects of the introduction into the environment of genetically modified organisms,

257.- planning and implementation of research into the problems of diminishing fertility;

258. - improvement of cancer and allergy records, the better to detect links with the environment, links with patterns of consumption and links with working conditions. There is moreover an urgent need for a listing of full details of assaults on the immune system and on fertility, and of the "endocrine disruptors".

259. - quantification of the economic and social impact of pathologies discovered (including externalities), in order to set priorities for intervention;

260. - design of environmental health indicators (including those within the framework of occupational physical and mental health), taking account of gender differences and those due to socio-economic conditions;

261. - strengthening of the policy for assessing and management of accident hazards, occupational disease and other hazards connected with work (including mental hazards), taking differences among groups with particular risks into account;

262. - Institution of a compulsory system of environmental quality standards for noxious substances in the ambient air and in closed spaces, or of health standards, to serve as a basis for Regional environmental standards.

Measures for particular economic sectors/industries

263. There is a need to implement policies and measures for particular economic sectors or particular industries, taking health into account and directing action to the causes of environmental health problems. The government here only recalls the priorities, which are treated in more detail in other chapters on these specific themes.

264. The government, jointly with the sectors or industries concerned, will take measures in the following fields:

265. - industry: product standards and eco-labels for construction materials, furniture, plain carpet, mattresses (to combat allergies). Compulsory product labelling so that allergic consumers can evaluate the risk, and specific information for the industry, in particular concerning problems encountered in older dwellings. Efforts to prevent accidents as a whole, and occupational disease for workers exposed to hazardous products. Reduction and, eventually, elimination of solvents; restriction, or even banning of the most harmful products;

266. - transport and energy: measures (as required, jointly with the Regions) to encourage a reduction in the damage and nuisance due to traffic, including air traffic, and to fuel combustion residues, in part by means of improvements in technical inspections (with the aim of contributing to the elimination of ozone and other pollutants); more effort to prevent traffic accidents, traffic noise and congestion, which are sources of stress and of pollution; measures encouraging non-polluting forms of transport that provide physical exercise (walking, cycling...). Petrol and diesel engine fumes must be limited by technical measures on the one hand and organisational measures on the other. The technical measures consist, firstly, of refining the design of existing engines, and secondly of replacing them with more environment-friendly ones (hydrogen, electricity). The authorities must promote research into these technologies and discourage the use of older engine types. The organisational measures involve limiting traffic nuisance, just as much as coming down hard on contraventions. Alternative transport patterns need promoting both primarily (with provision of the necessary infrastructure) and in a secondary manner (insurance techniques);

267. - electromagnetic fields: determination of regulations for the potential hazards of electromagnetic fields, taking account of international (WHO) standards concerning electromagnetic radiation;

268. - agriculture:

269. - surveillance of the safety of foodstuffs by a Federal Agency for Food Chain Safety (in the process of being set up). This Agency will work along the lines of the strategy set out in the White Book on Food Safety, approved on 12 January 2000, providing risk evaluations as well as determining inspection protocols. The government will ensure consumer access to this information;

270. - implementation of the proposal of the Biosafety Council for the organising of an ad hoc "sustainable development" group under it for studying the effects of growing and use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and ensuring objective public information and awareness about the results of the study;

271. - so far as genetically modified organisms are concerned, the government, along with the European Union, will observe the precautionary principle until the modification of Directive 90/220, which has been announced, comes into force;

272. - restrictions on the use of pesticides, both in terms of quantity and in terms of the number of active ingredients, and control of the risks connected with pesticide use, including eventually full prohibition of hazardous pesticides or ones for which the danger level is unknown, with the aim of protecting both human health (for instance via the food chain) and the environment (for instance the marine environment, or biodiversity), by drawing users' attention to the risks for their health, in agriculture and elsewhere, and promoting the use of natural means of pest control;

273. - Health: the government will, jointly with Communities, encourage efforts against smoking, including passive smoking, with particular care for young people who do not yet smoke, and pregnant women. Belgium will play an active part in the negotiation and application of the framework convention against tobacco and its protocols, currently being prepared by the WHO. The government will take measures to encourage appropriate use of antibiotics, so as to restrict the rate at which new and resistant strains of bacteria arise. These measures will support the efforts to combat the development of infectious diseases contracted during hospital stays. The government will support a multi-layer health care, and lay emphasis on first line care. In this framework, general practitioners and local health clinics will play a role of first importance in combating diseases linked with the environment;

274. - law: practical application of the constitutionally guaranteed right to the protection of a healthy environment.

Integration

275. All environmental health requires prevention, not least through changes in patterns of production and consumption which give rise to pollution. Since preventive medicine falls almost entirely within the Communities' competence and a large proportion of environmental matters falls to the Regions, there must be integration not only among the policies for each sector and industry but also among the various levels of government. The Government will see to it that the fulfilment and implementation of the National Environmental Health Action Plan allows proper structuring of environmental health protection by having various levels of government and different sectors work together, by improving Government communication and access to information and taking the international context into account.

c. Implementation of the Plan

276. The structure of the National Environmental Health Action Plan was adopted on 2 March 1999 by the working party of the Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy (CCPIE) and it should have been drawn up by that group in 2000. Following a public enquiry and consultation of the CFDD, the Regions and the Communities, the National Environmental Health Action Plan will be approved at an interministerial conference on the environment at which health ministers will be present and then submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval as a whole. Its period is four years, with provision for an assessment review at mid-term. The implementation of the measures proposed will depend on the various Ministries concerned.

3. Actions on agriculture – marine environment - biodiversity

277. Protection of the environment, and of the marine environment in particular, requires the adoption of new strategies concerning a number of different activities, particularly in the agricultural sector and in the area of biodiversity conservation. These issues must be integrated into a vision of the future based on a precautionary perspective (see Part 1. Principle of precaution). The chapter of Agenda 21 which specifically deals with the marine environment describes the first steps to be taken along this path. Its first two headings deal with the effects of activities in coastal areas; the next, with ways in which the marine environment can be degraded by land-based activities; and the third deals with conservation of the diversity of marine biological resources. These questions, which today play a decisive role in considering future risks, are also dealt with in greater depth in this Plan, even though agriculture and biodiversity are not the only points at issue when considering pollution of the marine environment (since the development of energy, industry, tertiary services, etc., also influence it). However that may be, there is a proportion of marine pollution which does indeed arise from land-based activities such as agriculture. That activity responds to needs, especially the need for food. The challenge that this Plan must meet therefore consists in responding to such needs while giving priority to the multifunctional nature of agriculture, increasing its beneficial effects, (including socio-economic ones, and the maintenance of the countryside in partnership with the Regions), and reducing its harmful effects, above all on biodiversity and the environment, which have short- and long-term impacts on health. This approach also emphasises other considerable potential benefits of such actions, such as diversification of agricultural and non-agricultural employment; these are dealt with in each of the following sections.

3.1. Policy promoting sustainable development of agriculture

3.1.1. Present situation

278. In Europe as a whole, the contribution of agriculture to total economic activity is nowadays quite small: 2.3% of GDP and 5.3% of employment. In Belgium, 1.98 % of the active population works in agriculture and produces 1.17% of GDP. The evolution of structures and patterns of production has had socio-economic and environmental consequences. In social and economic terms, the most obvious are the constant decrease in the number of farms⁴⁵ and jobs, as well as mounting indebtedness. This situation results in an increasing number of producers leaving the sector, an ageing of the population engaged in agriculture and a disinclination among the young to take over farms. In spite of the significant fall in agricultural employment, this sector still plays an important socio-economic role in rural areas. Value added is growing more slowly here than in most other sectors or industries; nevertheless, agriculture provides most of the food supply and plays a major role in land and countryside management. It is attended by both beneficial and harmful effects for the environment. Lastly, it is necessary to take account of agriculture's multifunctional role in the management of water and of natural cycles, including the carbon cycle.

279. Agriculture depends on the availability of natural resources, and the exploitation of these gives rise to environmental pressures. Across Europe, those pressures have increased with the intensification of farming practices. Production of milk and pork has become more intensive, and rising yields for the major crops have entailed an increased use of inputs: European consumption of fertiliser has risen from about 5 million tons in 1950 to over 20 million tons in the 1970s and 1980s and is currently around 16 million tons. European use of pesticides shows a similar trend; the quantity used in 1996 was some 300,000 tons per year. The most recent figures, however, show a reversal of this trend for both pesticides and

45 -19% from 1992 to 1998.



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Agriculture depends on the availability of natural resources and exerts pressure on the environment

fertilisers. On the other hand, the amount of energy used per unit produced continues to grow.

280. Agriculture puts pressure on aquatic environments. Nitrate and phosphate run-off leads to eutrophication in surface and marine waters. An increase in nitrate levels and pollution by pesticides and their residues has been observed in drinking water supplies, surface waters and groundwater. Atmospheric pressures are also produced. Agriculture is the main source of ammonia emissions, which lead to acidification of soils and water and contribute to acid rain. Agriculture is also a major source of methane and NO_x emissions, arising from animal husbandry and fertiliser, respectively, both of which contribute to the greenhouse effect. Methyl bromide, which is a destroyer of stratospheric ozone, has been widely used in horticulture.

281. These phenomena pose threats to human health, conservation of biodiversity including ecosystem balance; and also economic damage to fisheries, drinking water production, tourism, etc.

282. The development and adoption of new production methods could provide solutions. Indeed, there is a growing demand for products produced by farming methods with a beneficial effect on the environment, such as integrated production, traditional agriculture using fewer inputs, and organic farming. Organic farming, for instance, offers a combination of environmental, social and economic effects: its main benefits to the environment have a positive impact, for instance on biodiversity. Non-environmental benefits arise from job creation due to increased manpower requirements, while the benefit to producers comes in the form of higher sales prices. A European legal framework applicable to organic production is already in place, but less attention has been paid to conversion and marketing problems; a number of Member States consider the latter a major obstacle to the growth of the organic sector.

283. A production method such as organic farming is not easy to extend to the whole of agricultural production. It is therefore advisable to contemplate measures which make it possible to reduce the negative effects and increase the positive effects of agricultural activities as a whole. Such measures will be far more effective if they are planned at European level (CAP) or even international level.

284. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union broadly determines Belgian Federal agricultural policy. The initial objectives of the CAP as set out in Article 33 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (1957) are still in force: (i) to increase agricultural productivity by promoting technical progress and by ensuring the rational development of agricultural production and the optimum utilisation of the factors of production, in particular labour; (ii) thus to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture; (iii) to stabilise markets; (iv) to assure the availability of supplies; and (v) to ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices. The CAP itself fits into a context of agreements concerning international trade. The pillars of the CAP are the policy of the market and prices, including commercial relations with third countries; rural policy; and the harmonisation of national legislation for normative issues that are not the province of common market organisations (CMO).

285. At the last reform of the CAP (1999), Member States chose to favour an agricultural model for Europe in which agriculture must, as an economic sector, be multifunctional, sustainable, competitive and distributed throughout the territory of Europe (including less favoured regions and mountain areas). It must be capable of supporting the countryside, maintaining nature areas, and making an essential contribution to the vitality of rural life; it should also respond to consumers' preoccupations and requirements concerning the quality and safety of food products, protection of the environment and defence of animal welfare. Set in the wider framework of World Trade Organisation negotiations, this multifunctional model for agriculture supported by the European Union needs to be further refined and robustly defended. The reform of the CAP, decided within the framework of Agenda 2000, offers a number of opportunities in terms of sustainable agriculture. The new resources available must now be used for the practical realisation of sustainable development. The main instruments envisaged in Agenda 2000 for the attainment of these objectives are horizontal rules and the new rural development policy. The horizontal rules establish common rules for direct payments to farmers. These payments may be subject to environmental requirements and/or adjusted depending on employment levels in a farm unit, the overall prosperity of the farm and the total direct aid the farm receives in a given year. The rural development policy has been reinforced and now includes compulsory agri-environmental measures. At the sectoral level within agriculture, existing measures concerning protection of the environment are maintained and in some cases strengthened (encouragement of more extensive farming, conditions for treatment of livestock).

286. Thus, measures have been or will be taken to lessen environmental stress within the framework of the 1992 and 1999 CAP reforms, and elsewhere. Other measures will also be necessary for purposes which include reductions in water contamination by pesticides or fertilisers. So far as atmospheric emissions are concerned, the total volume of methane emissions should diminish appreciably by 2010 as a result of initiatives currently being implemented, mainly at national level. Furthermore, non-food agricultural production such as oilseeds and bio-gas could make a significant contribution to lowering CO₂ emissions and those of other polluting substances by encouraging renewable sources of energy. It should be emphasised that the production of bio-gas also contributes to lowering methane emissions and thus provides a double dividend in combating climate change.

287. Federal policy on agriculture covers price and market policy, product policy and health policy. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Self-employed participates in drawing up and administering the CAP at European level. It also handles the management of production, the

quality of plant and animal products and the raw materials used in agriculture. Measures related to the reform of farming subsidies and the price policy applied to this sector have been taken under Agenda 2000 and will apply until 2003. In order to prepare for the subsequent period, there needs to be an examination now of the extent to which aids to production could be replaced by an income subsidy paid directly to farmers by the Federal authorities and linked to specific conditions concerning protection of nature and the environment.

3.1.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

288. One of the primary objectives of the new European agricultural policy is to maintain and promote sustainable agriculture which respects natural and semi-natural areas as well as environmental needs according to the provisions of Articles 2 and 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty. This objective is the Government's bench-mark: in particular, it allows it to pursue and strengthen a policy of quality production which respects health and the environment.

289. Within the framework of international negotiations, or in the event of reform of the CAP, the Government will, among other objectives, pursue the following new ones: (i) the defence of each farm's specific role in a multifunctional agriculture; (ii) a compulsory ceiling for direct aid to any given farm; (iii) the establishment of a closer link between product quality standards and the payment of direct subsidies; (iv) animal husbandry more closely linked to the soil by various means, including by reduced dependence on protein imports used for animal feed and a proper grain-growing policy; (v) more attention to agricultural employment; (vi) a review of animal husbandry practices (for instance, routine use of antibiotics, etc.); (vii) more attention to animal welfare in husbandry; (viii) market orientation in which the prices of agricultural products cover the costs of production (all costs); (ix) review of subsidies to certain sectors (for instance, tobacco growing). As regards deliberations with the Regions, current legislation will be rigorously applied.

290. Conversion to organic farming will be encouraged so as to increase the number of producers using this mode of production (very low at present) by 70% per year from 2000 to 2003. In terms of land area, the objective is to reach, by 2003, a minimum of 4% of total farming area using, or in the process of conversion to, organic farming. By 2010, 10% of total farming area should be set aside for organic farming.

291. As regards the leaching of organic substances (nitrogen, phosphorus) to the aquatic environment, priority will be given to agriculture's contribution to a 50% reduction in total nutrient load relative to 1985 levels, in compliance with the commitments undertaken at the Third North Sea Conference. This objective is part of the implementation of the OSPAR strategy for combating eutrophication (see paragraph 330).

292. Success in realising these objectives will have to be evaluated by means of a series of indicators. For this, the European Commission is currently developing indicators for the environment and agriculture, based on the expertise developed by international organisations such as the OECD. The Government's proposal is that these indicators be used for following progress towards the objectives described above. Growth in the number of farmers using organic methods and the percentage of cultivated area used for organic farming will be used as indicators of measures to encourage organic production.

b. Policies and measures

293. Under the horizontal rules, Member States take the environmental measures they consider appropriate for agricultural activities falling within the scope of the Regulation taking into account land use, production levels and the potential effects of these activities on the

environment. These measures may take the form of:

294. - making subsidies conditional on agri-environmental undertakings;

295. - general environmental requirements;

296. - specific environmental requirements constituting a condition for direct payments.

297. Member States may also, within the framework of the horizontal rules and in order to ensure that farmers take account of employment considerations, lay down conditions regarding labour input, overall prosperity or amounts granted. They may reduce the grant paid to a farmer who fails to comply with the relevant limit. This reduction may not, however, exceed 20% of the total amount of assistance granted.

298. The Government's action programme for sustainable agriculture contains the following essential points, intended to implement the European regulation:

299. - the application of environmental preconditions ('eco-conditionality'), jointly with the Regions, to all direct grants provided within the framework of common market organisations. Moreover, specific environmental criteria will be used in some sectors (e.g., adjustment of direct grants depending on the stocking rate). The effects of this measure will be felt above all in the arable and beef/veal sectors, from 2000 onwards, and in the milk/dairy sector beginning in 2005;

300. -the inclusion of agri-environmental measures in rural development plans. More particularly, there will be actions to, firstly, support organic and integrated farming methods (by keeping acreage grants for organic farming, and in other ways) and, secondly, to restrict applications of fertiliser and pesticides to the amounts necessary and sufficient to achieve high-quality production in the quantities desired without adversely affecting the environment (soil, water table, surface waters). In this field, emphasis will be placed on financial grants aimed at encouraging the application of environmentally friendly methods of agricultural production. There will be a programme for reductions in the use of biocides (e.g for household use), and the use of pesticides in agriculture, in both quantitative and qualitative terms (elimination of all substances posing a risk to the health of people living nearby or consumers).

301. The policy described above will be accompanied by measures organised around the following points:

302. - adaptation and widening of the present legal framework (protection of organic and integrated methods of agricultural production, rules for the marketing of their produce);

303. - reduction (by up to the 20% maximum) in direct grants to producers. The criteria used for this adjustment are: the level of employment at a farm, which criterion will be used on its own or in combination with the following criteria: (i) the overall prosperity of the farm (particularly size), and (ii) the total of direct payments to that farm in a given year;

304. - widening the scope of product standards legislation to include agricultural products, in accordance with the government agreement (see under Products policy). The widening will extend to products for use in agriculture;

305. - intensification of independent agronomic research⁴⁶ into environmentally friendly agricultural production methods, including those using new crop rotations, integrated agriculture, integrated pest management, and organic farming, etc;

306. – continuation of efforts to eliminate hormones, and a coordinated policy against the

⁴⁶ Research activities must comply with the ethical principles and codes of conduct internationally recognised as set out in para. 31.1 of Agenda 21.

improper use of antibiotics in agriculture;

307. - implementation of an active policy of education and information to disseminate and promote environmentally friendly agricultural production methods (integrated agriculture, organic farming, integrated pest management...) and to increase awareness of this subject throughout the farming world. There must be a suitable advisory service to put farmers in touch with innovative and environmentally friendly farming methods and to join with them in creating a process that allows these methods to be put into practice. A special effort must be made to ensure that operations further along the food chain are adapted to rural development plans where cooperation with other rural groups is necessary. There also needs to be provision for an advisory service to promote this cooperation among various rural actors. Each Region should establish a forum where experiences concerning supporting measures can be shared among the different bodies and organisations involved in providing support. Communication will also have to be aimed at consumers and public opinion, in an integrated fashion and at various levels, in order to stimulate questions;

308. - definition of agri-environmental indicators, to be derived so far as possible from data already available, which take account of regional differences and of agriculture's multifunctional nature;

309. - definition of reference levels making it possible to work out when agriculture is providing a service to society which should be remunerated and when the 'polluter-pays' principle should apply. These reference levels will serve to define good farming practice and in the application of 'eco-conditionality': the general and specific environmental requirements taken into account in applying eco-conditionality to direct grants may not fall below these reference levels. In addition, these levels could take account of criteria relating to animal welfare.

310. A plan for reduction in pesticide use will be prepared. It will aim at a substantial reduction in their use and take account of qualitative aspects. This reduction plan will: (i) be designed to fit in with the codes of good practice defined at Regional level; (ii) use both economic incentives and regulations; (iii) cover both the sale of pesticides to individuals and their use by public authorities; (iv) aim to eliminate pesticide residues on and in consumer products; (v) emphasise action on the substances considered a priority under international commitments.

311. The feasibility of recourse to fiscal instruments to attain the objectives of less intensive agriculture will be considered.

312. Proper attention will be devoted to joint deliberation by the Federal authorities and other levels of government so as to guarantee coherence among various measures, with full respect for the sphere of authority of each.

c. Implementation of the Plan

313. The reform of the CAP was approved in the first half of 1999: most of its measures came into force on 1 January 2000. Member States have also presented their rural development plans to the European Commission. The Government has given the Ministry of Agriculture and the Self-employed the task of preparing a timetable for the detailed application of the measures in this Action Plan that relate to agriculture. The responsibilities for implementing the various measures must be determined in consultation with the Regions and will have to appear in the corresponding budgets (see paragraph 776).

314. All of the major social groups, as defined in Agenda 21, will be consulted by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Self-employed concerning the proposed measures. In addition, the opinion of the Federal Council on Sustainable Development will be sought.

3.2. Policy for protecting and managing the marine environment

3.2.1. Present situation

315. The main environmental problems facing the marine environment in general and the North Sea in particular are those of hazardous substances, growing pressures on coastal areas (including eutrophication), over-fishing, harm to marine mammals and seabirds, and loss of biodiversity. The many pressures this environment is subjected to are liable to increase in future, and new pressures may be expected. Moreover, the various uses to which the North Sea is put tend more and more to conflict with each other. The problem is therefore one of managing these activities while ensuring their compatibility with protection of the marine environment and the sustainable use of marine resources. This is a problem which Belgium faces most acutely, in that it has just increased its zone of jurisdiction in the North Sea, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea; this amounts to a de facto extension of its zone of responsibility for protection and sustainable management of the marine environment.

316. Hazardous substances, including radioactive substances, are a threat to public health and to the protection of the seas and oceans. They are also liable to compromise economic uses of the marine environment. The phenomenon of eutrophication is a good illustration of how sensitive coastal areas are to disturbance. This phenomenon, caused by the run-off of increased amounts of nutrients such as nitrate and phosphorus, usually takes the form of changes in the structure and functioning of the ecosystem owing to a proliferation of unwanted or toxic algae, to the detriment of other species; one result is a lessening of biodiversity. In the case of both substances, the main source is human land-based activities by households, industries and those involved in agriculture.

317. As to fishing: Belgian catches have gradually declined from 43,000 tons in 1980 to 31,000 tons in 1984. So far, the system of quotas set up at European level has not managed to improve the catastrophic state of certain fish stocks (sole, cod, etc.) nor to reduce the serious imbalance between the number of fishing boats and the quantities of fish available. Worse, the type of fishing practised, beam trawling, is harmful to bottom-dwelling stocks. Fishing agreements with developing countries, including those under the aegis of the Common European Fisheries Policy, are also a major destabilising factor for traditional systems of fishing and cause degradation of these countries' ecosystems.

318. Biodiversity is threatened by the various uses made of coastal areas, and a number of species have disappeared or become rare (skate, herring, mackerel, porpoise, dolphin, seal, murex, oyster, sturgeon, salmon, lamprey, eel, etc.). Other species have been introduced by human activity (in ships'ballasts and hulls). Some of these "invasive" species have flourished abundantly, and some of them are poisonous.

319. The marine environment, as final recipient of most of the pollutants issuing from human activities, is affected, for good or ill, by most of the policies undertaken. Consequently, a policy of protection which emphasises "downstream" aspects cannot easily be rendered effective. Policies relating to the economy, health, finance, transport, agriculture and energy provide important leverage for adjusting pressures on the marine environment. But comprehensive integration of these policies is still weak and will be strengthened.

3.2.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

320. Belgium is a signatory to a number of international obligations aimed at protection and

management of the marine environment. The objectives of these undertakings are:

321. - a continuous reduction in emissions of hazardous and/or radioactive substances, with the ultimate aim of achieving (by 2020) concentrations in the marine environment near background levels for naturally occurring substances and close to zero for man-made synthetic substances;

322. - restoration of degraded marine areas;

323. - achieving and conserving a healthy marine environment without eutrophication;

324. - halting declines in fish stocks and developing an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, which rules out over-exploitation of fishery resources;



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The marine environment is confronted with overfishing, threats to marine mammals and seabirds as well as a loss of biodiversity

325. - conservation of marine biodiversity and restoration of threatened or locally extinct species;

326. - definition of environmental objectives for offshore activities.

327. There has been definite progress in the application of some of these obligations; but difficulties in implementing recent commitments show the need for greater changes. The Government is therefore committed to pursuing the achievement of the objectives defined by these international commitments.

328. Progress towards these objectives will be monitored by means of sustainable development indicators such as the extent of waste water treatment, the use of pesticides in agriculture, use of fertilisers, and the algal index...

329. The Government will ensure that there is active and integrated management of the coastal zone, in cooperation with the Flanders Region and the province of West Flanders.

b. Policies and measures

330. In order to fulfil these international commitments in practice, an action programme integrated at Federal level will be set up to round off the measures already taken by the Regions and those they are still to take within their own areas of competence. The objectives of this action programme will include those determined at international level. This programme will cover, among other things, the implementation of the OSPAR strategies for (i) hazardous substances, (ii) radioactive substances, (iii) eutrophication; (iv) the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity, and (v) offshore activities. It will pay particular attention to the implementation of European directives and PARCOM measures for combating eutrophication.

331. These arrangements will also include the preparation of operational plans to prevent accidental pollution, the preparation of a programme to restrict those pesticides which threaten the marine environment, and greater attention to the impact of all policies on the state of the marine environment. Different instruments (regulatory, fiscal, legislative) will be used to that end. Among the latter will be those referred to in the government agreement: the product standards legislation, and tax reform.

332. The Government will use the revision of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) set for 2002 to argue for sustainable management of fishery resources and the elimination of practices that do not respect the ecosystem. For this purpose, it will make use of the opportunities offered by its presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2001. In particular, and in accordance with the ministerial meeting in Bergen, the Federal Government will see to it that:

333. - the future CFP takes into account the impact of fishing on the functioning of the marine ecosystem and its components. This is to be done with respect for the precautionary principle;

334. - the future CFP does not adversely affect the fisheries of non-European countries, with particular attention to the harmful consequences the CFP has had on developing countries (evaluation of the effects of fisheries agreements, decommissioning of boats, etc.);

335. - the future CFP makes it possible to guarantee an exploitation regime compatible with balanced fish stocks. To this end, a structural decrease in the capacity of the fishing fleet will be pursued;

336. - the future CFP plans the gradual phasing out of industrial fishing for other purposes than direct human consumption;

337. - the means needed to guarantee proper application of the CFP are reinforced.

338. Other measures to combat over-fishing will be put forward in the action programme, after consultation with the major social groups (including the appropriate trade organisations) and partner countries. These measures include: (i) commitment to and observance of the Code of Conduct for responsible fisheries; (ii) commitment to and observance of the FAO Agreement for promoting compliance with international conservation and management measures by deep-sea fishing vessels; (iii) commitment to and observance of the Agreement on straddling stocks; (iv) the development and promotion of more selective and environmentally friendly fishing methods instead of the current beam trawling; (v) provisions to regulate access by fishing boats (taking the CFP into account), such as for instance a complete ban on fishing for sole within a three-mile limit around the Belgian coast by boats of more than 70 tons gross; (vi) a complete ban on suction systems for gathering shellfish in Belgian territorial waters; and (vii) improvements in monitoring measures for the Common Fisheries Policy.

339. The recently adopted Marine Environment Protection Act provides for a number of

implementing decrees. A timetable will be established for those concerning: (i) the creation of protected marine areas; (ii) the introduction of systems for organising maritime traffic; (iii) compensation for requisition measures in cases of danger to the marine environment; (iv) the recovery of costs for anti-pollution operations; (v) the rules concerning impact studies and assessments; (vi) procedures for granting permits and authorisations for those activities which require them; (vii) authorisations for disposal of dredging wastes; (viii) the detection and reparation of environmental disturbances; and (ix) protection of marine species. The creation of protected marine areas and the establishment of management plans for these areas will be priority measures. In certain categories of protected marine areas, fishing and military activities may be prohibited after consultation with the actors concerned, including the fishing industry. All these implementing decrees will have been enacted by December 2001.

340. The Government will take the initiative in European discussions to accord protection of the marine environment a central place in the Sixth Environmental Action Programme.

341. The Government will work to strengthen the coordination mechanisms between Federal and Regional levels. On the one hand, a mechanism for coordination among Federal departments will be put in place alongside the coordination mechanisms that already exist between the Federal Government and the Regions. On the other hand, the draft cooperation agreement between the Federal Government and the Flanders Region for integrated management of the coastal zone (including the "coastal land zone") will be rapidly finalised. This reinforcement of coordination mechanisms will enable the authorities to support the implementation of existing international commitments, to make better preparations for Belgium's positions in future negotiations and to reinforce consideration of protection and sustainable management of the marine environment in all policies carried out at Federal level.

342. As regards the safety of sea transport, the Government will make prevention of accidents and pollution from shipping priority issues for the Belgian presidency of the European Union. The aim will be to develop at the European level a preventive element of policy, which includes: (i) a supervisory regime for the registry companies which see to the safety of vessels; (ii) formulas which guarantee proper training for ships' captains and crews; (iii) the definition of minimum structural characteristics for vessels; (iv) a liability mechanism for oil companies or those transporting hazardous products; and (v) a general regime banning ships from European ports if they do not have an adequate standard of safety or are not participants in the liability mechanism. In addition, the Federal Government will uphold the decision of principle by the International Maritime Organisation to ban the use of tributyl tin throughout the world from 2008 and will be pushing for an earlier phase-out.

343. An enforcement regime will also be developed. It will include reinforcement of the presence on the high seas for monitoring and observing human activities, and a review of the criteria of proof for environmental offences. Adequate funding will be made available on a recurrent basis to allow this increased presence on the high seas.

344. Support measures will be enacted, including measures to encourage awareness and provide better access to information with the aim of promoting a participatory approach, mechanisms for regular reporting, and the development of indicators for sustainable development. In accordance with the government agreement, the Government will support research into environmentally friendly products and techniques. Particular attention will be given to the protection of the marine environment in this research, and a new programme of scientific support, "Sustainable Management of the North Sea", will be prepared and adopted. This programme will be designed to provide the scientific basis for the measures envisaged in the action programme for protection and management of the marine environment. Particular attention will be given to information and awareness concerning protection and management of the marine environment in order to support the implementation of the Marine Environment Protection Act.

c. Implementation of the Plan

345. The draft action programme for the protection and management of the marine environment is in preparation. The Government has given the CIDD the task of finalising it by June 2001. After consultation with the CFDD, it will be forwarded to the Council of Ministers for approval. The CIDD will create an ad hoc Working Group to coordinate the final drafting of this first plan.

3.3. Policy for conservation of biodiversity

3.3.1. Present situation

346. Biodiversity is defined as the variability of living organisms of all kinds including, among others, terrestrial ecosystems, marine and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes they belong to; this includes both diversity within species and that among species, as well as that of whole ecosystems.

347. The diversity of physical environments in Belgium has given rise to great biological diversity. Since Neolithic times, this "biodiversity" has been strongly influenced by farming and pastoral activities. Over the last hundred years, the pressures on flora, fauna and ecological processes have increased as the result of pollution of the air, water and soil and, more recently, the intensification of agriculture and sea fishing, as well as increases in pollution from other human activities that threaten the components of biodiversity in ecosystems that were formerly natural or semi-natural. These developments, as well as the increasing break-up of natural zones due to urban sprawl and the proliferation of roads, explain how a significant number of species have disappeared or become rare in the course of the last four decades.

348. At global level, the hastening destruction of ecosystems by deforestation, mining projects, the construction of large dams and the practice of monoculture are also causing a loss of biodiversity. Local and indigenous communities are the first to feel the effects of this destruction.

349. Recourse to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture and animal husbandry may favour quantitative and qualitative improvements in production but is also liable to have an impact on biodiversity. Despite potential benefits (which can lead in some cases to a reduction in pesticide or fertiliser use), the watchword must be 'caution'. From the point of view of biodiversity protection, the risks to be considered include that of impoverishing the genetic diversity of the species used and the risk of causing unwanted resistance to certain pesticides among plants. Specific medical applications of GMOs – including those for the production of vaccines – may be a sustainable way to promote the health of the world population. On the other hand, the use of GMOs and their introduction into the environment raises both scientific and social questions. This is where the notion of biosafety comes in: the definition of procedures for risk analysis and risk management in the transfer, handling and use of all modified living organisms arising from biotechnology, with full safety for public health and the environment (including the protection of biodiversity). It is particularly important to apply the precautionary principle in this context.

350. Owing to the development of biotechnologies, issues connected with intellectual property rights are becoming increasingly important in debates over biodiversity, for these also apply to patents taken on discoveries in biotechnology and molecules derived from living tissue. The international community must provide for coherence between the provisions of the Biodiversity Convention which aim to facilitate access to genetic resources and a sharing of the benefits derived from their use, on the one hand, and the provisions of the agreements on intellectual property rights (TRIPS agreements) adopted during the GATT negotiations on

the other hand. It is also important to fight the improper appropriation of biological resources by means of patents ("bio-piracy"), which can be to the disadvantage of individuals or developing countries. Bio-piracy is increasing in scale and scope at world level, and local communities and indigenous peoples are its first victims.

351. The international community adopted the Biodiversity Convention at the Rio summit in 1992. This Convention, which has been ratified by 171 countries including Belgium, was the start of a process to which the contracting parties (the signatory countries) have committed themselves, with the aim of putting its aims into practice.

352. Matters specifically affecting the conservation of biodiversity in the seas and oceans are dealt with in the chapter on policy for protecting and managing the marine environment.

3.3.2. Action Plan

353. The Federal Plan will have the same objectives as those set out in the international commitments on biodiversity conservation. This thematic Plan will include strategic objectives, policies and measures which apply to Federal aspects of strategies for biosafety and sustainable conservation of biodiversity as provided for in the Biodiversity Convention (CBD).

a. Strategic objectives

354. The objectives of the Biodiversity Convention adopted at Rio in 1992 are: the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its elements, and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the exploitation of genetic resources.

355. Progress towards these objectives will be monitored via indicators for sustainable development, such as, for instance, the percentage of development cooperation projects implemented within the framework of the CBD, the percentage of imported tropical hardwoods that come from sustainably managed forests, the percentage of land area protected, the percentage of species endangered, and the use of pesticides in farming. The appropriate indicators will have to match the indicators used or developed at Regional level.

b. Policies and measures

356. The international commitments provide for a series of measures for moving towards these objectives, such as:

357. - the drafting of a strategy and a national Action Plan to implement the CBD;

358. - reporting obligations under the CBD;

359. - the implementation of the Global Action Plan for conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, instituted by the Declaration of Leipzig (June 1996);

360. - ensuring safety in the domestic market concerning GMOs;

361. - the development of ecological surveillance and evaluation methods before GMOs or their derivative products are used;

362. - the promotion of capacity-building on the part of the developing countries concerning biodiversity and biosafety (while at the same time ensuring that this does not serve as a cover for bio-piracy activities).

363. The Government will classify these measures into a Federal component and an

international component, and these must complement the measures already taken by the Regions and those to be taken in future, within their own areas of competence. Different instruments will be used (regulatory, fiscal, legislative). Among the last group will be those mentioned in the government agreement: product standards legislation (see Products policy), tax reform by means of sliding adjustments so as to end up with a policy that is more social, more favourable to employment and more ecological (see Part 4, Taxation). Development Cooperation policy will be one important means of action, as will the assessment of the present agreements concerning aspects of intellectual property rights as they affect trade (TRIPS agreements).

Federal Strategy for conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity

364. Belgium can have an impact on biodiversity conservation on a national scale (by adapting farm, forestry, anti-pollution, transport, and energy policies, etc.).

365. The Federal strategy for biodiversity conservation (species, habitats, natural processes and gene pools) will be drawn up in collaboration with the Regions. The national strategy and the Action Plan as called for in the CBD must be defined and implemented. Measures of restoration will be planned (endangered or extinct species, degraded ecosystems, etc.). In addition, the next reporting round under the CBD will be organised and funds made available for this purpose. An inventory of skills and expertise concerning agricultural and forest biodiversity, wetlands and invasive species will be established. The implementation of the Global Action Plan for conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for agriculture will include: (i) drawing up a national Action Programme; (ii) strengthening existing ex situ collections; (iii) support for the collection of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture; (iv) an increase in the number of activities for genetic improvement and widening of the genetic base for traditional varieties; (v) the promotion of greater diversity of plants in cultivation and of bred animal species. Where the Federal Government has responsibility for land management (military ranges, railway embankments, etc.), it will take the protection of biodiversity into account. Enforcement of CITES will be strengthened so as to support the policy of biodiversity conservation (training experts, providing inspectors, intensifying controls).

Federal strategy for biosafety

366. This will be based on the precautionary principle and will include: (i) the creation of a national body for the Biosafety Protocol ⁴⁷; (ii) the designation of one or more independent reference laboratories⁴⁸ for analysis of GMOs, which will contribute to the assessment and surveillance of GMOs and their derivative products when marketed or to be marketed (these laboratories should be integrated within a European network of laboratories) ; (iii) measures to support the Biosafety Council so as to achieve the objectives of Chapter 16 of Agenda 21; (iv) measures to support research into biosafety (impact on the environment and on farming practices, in particular). The Government remains in favour of developing scientific research in the field of GMOs.

367. Assessment of GMOs will not be restricted to the opinions provided by reference laboratories but will also include a complete analysis of risks (in terms of socioeconomics, ethics, etc ...)

368. A policy for information and the promotion of labelling of products containing GMOs will be implemented.

⁴⁷ By October 2000.

⁴⁸ Research activities must comply with the ethical principles and codes of conduct internationally recognised as set out in para. 31.1 of Agenda 21.

Measures of integration and coordination

369. Measures of integration and coordination will also be necessary; for in spite of the considerable general leverage as regards biodiversity protection already available in Federal policies, such protection is generally not strongly taken into account and there is little coordination on the matter among Federal departments. For the requirements of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to be effectively dealt with in our development model, there will be a need for better coordination of the policies carried out at Federal level, better integration of these policies and better linkage between these policies and those undertaken at Regional level. Measures will be taken for:

370. - a better preparation for the line taken by Belgium in future negotiations (the follow-up to the Convention on Biodiversity, negotiations within the framework of the WTO, reviews of the Common European Fisheries Policy, tenth anniversary of the Rio Conference, Belgian presidency of the European Union...) and better integration of foreign policies. Strategies of application in connection with any commitments undertaken will be worked out;

371. - better integration of domestic policies, by establishing a coordination mechanism among Federal departments to supplement the existing coordination between the Federal government and the Regions (CCPIE) concerning biodiversity.

Transversal measures

International strategy for biodiversity and biosafety

372. Belgium can have an impact on biodiversity conservation on an international scale (for instance, by favouring the import of tropical timber from properly managed forests or through its development cooperation policy), and also at the European level (systems of protected sites, meta-databases), with the involvement of the Regions.

373. The international strategy for biodiversity and biosafety will include: (i) an investigation into and assessment of the impact of official aid budgets on biodiversity; (ii) the institution of a reporting system concerning environmental and biodiversity impacts of development projects and Belgian investments abroad with state assistance; (iii) a study of the measures needed to promote scientific and technical cooperation within the framework of the CBD; (iv) actions in support of local and indigenous communities; and (v) encouraging partnership projects with non-EU countries (establishment of clearing-house mechanisms, remote sensing and data-gathering, access to Belgian expertise and collections). The coordination of work undertaken for the CBD and the WTO will be improved, in particular for the implementation and adaptation of the agreements on intellectual property rights (TRIPS). To this end, an exhaustive list of incentive measures operated by Belgium for the encouragement and promotion of technical and institutional capacity-building on the part of developing countries will be produced, and legal instruments against bio-piracy will be developed.

374. Actions in support of local and indigenous communities will include: (i) the ratification of ILO Convention 169 (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention); (ii) support to the strategies of indigenous peoples for the conservation of their traditional territories and the restoration of their control over the management of their natural heritage; (iii) initiatives for the international recognition of the collective intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples and local communities within the framework of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

375. In the case of imports of tropical timber into Belgium, measures (involving specifications for public service tendering, labels, measures of public awareness, etc.) will be taken in order to encourage imports of wood from forests that are managed in a way that minimises impacts

on the environment and biodiversity.

Requirements for scientific understanding

376. As far as requirements for scientific understanding are concerned, some major ones arise from our international commitments concerning biodiversity. In particular, a scientific effort is needed in view of the CBD. Also, there is at present an alarming loss of taxonomic expertise at world level. Listing of research activities and expertise concerning biodiversity, as well as of taxonomic collections, will be continued and will include biodiversity data for the marine areas under Belgian jurisdiction. Priorities for research into biodiversity (marine and terrestrial ecosystems) and biosafety will be worked out for the next Plan of scientific support for a policy of sustainable development covering the period 2000-2004, taking account of scientific requirements: (i) those defined by our international obligations (UNFCCC, CBD, North Sea, Antarctic, OSPAR, etc.); (ii) concerning development of GMOs for environmental purposes; (iii) concerning collections ex situ; (iv) concerning taxonomy; (v) on the evolution of biodiversity in ecosystems; (vi) on the impacts of humans on the biodiversity of ecosystems, taking interactions with socio-economic aspects into account. The definition of these priorities will be based, inter alia, on the work of the biodiversity expertise forum (2000-2001), which is to provide a list of the orientations and recommendations of research (including biodiversity indicators) conducted in Belgium within the framework of international research programmes.

Measures of public awareness

377. Measures to raise public awareness and inform major social groups, as under Agenda 21, about the stakes involved in biodiversity conservation will be strengthened.

c. Implementation of the Plan

378. A thematic Plan on biodiversity conservation in its Federal aspects, setting out these measures, is in preparation and will be completed by October 2000. After consultation with the CFDD, it will be forwarded to the Council of Ministers for approval. An ad hoc Working Group will be set up within the CIDD to coordinate the completion of this draft thematic Plan.

4. Actions on energy - transport - ozone and climate change

379. The protection of the atmosphere is a huge undertaking with many dimensions, which involve various sectors and branches of economic activity. In the chapter of Agenda 21 devoted to the atmosphere, the first two headings of recommended actions on particular industries deal with the development of the energy and transport industries. These industries, also dealt with in particular depth in this Plan, nowadays play a decisive role in the development of risks anticipated for the future, although they are not the only industries connected with atmospheric pollution (since developments in agriculture, other industries, and tertiary services, etc., also have an influence). A proportion of atmospheric pollution arises from emissions of gases due to the consumption of energy in all these sectors and industries. Energy is consumed in order to provide certain services to consumers, and particularly to meet their heating and mobility needs. The challenge faced by this Plan is therefore to meet these needs while giving priority to the needs of the most deprived and at the same time improving the ecological aspects of the energy and transport systems which, in turn, could have benefits in terms of health. Alongside a reduction in pollution, this approach also demonstrates, in each of the three following themes, other considerable potential benefits from such actions, e.g., reducing the risk of inadequate supplies in the very long term and dealing with the problems of traffic congestion and lack of mobility that already confront us.

4.1. Policy promoting sustainable development of energy

4.1.1. Present situation

380. The implementation of sustainable development energy strategies is one of the main opportunities available to humanity for taking the path of sustainable development. Energy is in fact involved twice over in the attainment of the objectives of Agenda 21. As a finite resource and a source of nuisance, damage and pollution, energy is at the origin of a number of obstacles on the path to sustainable development. But energy is also a key ingredient in economic and social well-being. Energy policy therefore imposes a constant trade-off between citizens' and firms' demands for energy to meet their essential needs (as well as certain levels of competitiveness and quality), and the imperative of respect for the highest standards of security of supply, safety and environmental protection.

381. The end-user consumption of energy in Belgium meets requirements for heating (which accounts for 29%), lighting (2.3%), travel and personal transport (18.2%), freight transport (4.3%), power supplies to industry, pumps and machinery (3.5%), industrial processes (29.7%) and non-energy uses (11.9%). The rest (1.1%) represents other uses of electricity, such as, among others, office machinery, refrigerators and freezers, air-conditioning and hot water for home use.⁴⁹ These consumption rates reveal enormous regional differences. The quantity of primary energy converted in the production of this end-use energy increased from 1970 to 1998 at an annual rate of 1.1%, while the GDP of Belgium was growing at 2.4% per year. There was thus a certain "uncoupling" of these two rates of growth, since the former was clearly lower than the latter. This uncoupling reflects a trend towards lower energy content of production, or an improvement in energy efficiency, of 1.2% per year on average over this period. The improvement was partly due to the structural modification of the economy during the period in question. One possible explanation, indeed, points to a degree of outward relocation of energy-intensive production. However, data that would identify this as an explanation are not available. The economic statistics nevertheless show an increase in the service sector's share in total economic activity. Now this tertiary or service sector is less energy-intensive than the primary (agriculture) and secondary (industry) sectors. This

⁴⁹ Source: Ministry of Economic Affairs.

improvement in overall energy use is also connected with the gradual implementation, in all sectors, of new technologies which allow the use of less energy per unit of production. The process was not continuous over the period under consideration, but took place, essentially, under the impact of increases in energy prices during the two oil shocks of 1973-1974 and 1980-1984. Increases in energy prices encourage reductions in consumption, and vice versa. For the last five years of this period (sub-period 1994-1998), we observe a deterioration in energy efficiency at a rate of 0.9% per year on average. This drop is probably accounted for mainly in terms of the decreasing real price of energy (1.8% per year, over the same sub-period). If there were no deliberate policy, the Federal Planning Bureau estimates that there would be an increase averaging 1.2% per year in energy consumption over the period 2000-2005⁵⁰. Since the end of the period studied (1998), the price of energy has increased rapidly, mainly following a threefold increase in the price of crude oil since March 1999. The impact of this price rise on consumption will be known for certain only in early 2001. It would not, however, be justified to design measures now merely on the basis of trends in 1998 and earlier years, in view of the enormous change in price since then.

382. The first stress caused by this consumption of energy is the expense to household budgets occasioned by the price of energy. The "internal" costs of energy are those borne by the various categories of energy consumer (households, firms, administrations), for conversion or consumption of energy under the right conditions (purchases of primary energy, or installation costs for anti-pollution systems, equipment for energy-saving systems, etc.). The accelerated liberalisation of the electricity and gas industries will enable consumers as a body to benefit from lower tariffs and better service.

383. The second category of pressure produced by the consumption of energy is the "external costs" it imposes on the environment. These are also known as "social costs" because they are imposed on society via the ecological disturbances caused by extraction, processing, combustion and transport of certain forms of energy.

384. - This applies to the harm caused by the use of energy from fossil fuels (coal, gas, oil): lead emissions (combustion with additives), marine oil spills (prospecting, processing, and transport), methane emissions (extraction and processing), residues of cadmium, mercury, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter in the air (including black smoke), carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide (CO₂, linked to the greenhouse effect) - all are connected with combustion. A large part of these noxious effects are connected with development of the transport industry, and many of them cause the atmospheric problems dealt with in the two following themes.

385. - The same [external costs] is true for some of the problems that attend the last stage of the nuclear energy cycle (surface storage of radioactive waste, deep storage, reprocessing and transport of waste, decommissioning of nuclear power stations, spent fuel handling), to the extent that these costs are not already internalised in the sale price.

386. A third type of pressure due to energy consumption concerns specific environmental risks connected with the civil use of nuclear energy. These involve, among other things, the risk of accidents (the International Atomic Energy Agency is studying the scale and likelihood of such accidents, and there is considerable debate on the matter) and the risks connected with the proliferation of nuclear weapons (the importance of which has justified the existence of an international Non-Proliferation Treaty).

387. We must also mention the danger of dependence on non-renewable resources, whether of fossil or of fissile material, which is liable to become rare or run out.

388. Lastly, renewable sources of energy. These do not contribute to the global impact or risks dealt with in the following two sections, though there are certain production chains which

⁵⁰ Economic Prospects 2000-2005, Federal Planning Bureau, April 2000, page 87.



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Belgium has pledged to reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases by 7,5% by 2008-2012

under some conditions can also lead to irreversible damage to ecosystems: impact of the construction of large dams on the balance of large river basins; diversion of extensive areas of fertile agricultural land to energy farms, etc.

389. These social costs of energy are not, or not wholly, included in market prices. It is still the case that some of the expenditure on energy for meeting primary needs is higher in the case of disadvantaged households than for the average consumer, both on the global scale and within each country. This burden has a fundamental impact on situations of poverty, and that impact is aggravated by the effects on health of the forms of pollution described above (see the chapter on Environmental health policy).

390. The profitability of investments in a rational use of energy do not depend solely on increases in the price of energy. An electricity price increase cannot be regarded in the same light as an increase in energy prices caused by an oil shock; nor is either the same as a tax.

4.1.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

391. Belgium is committed to reducing its emissions of greenhouse gases by 7.5% for 2008-2012. These are mainly connected with the consumption of energy (in 1996, 76% of the greenhouse gases emitted in Belgium were composed of CO₂ from energy use).⁵¹ It is

⁵¹ Federal Plan Bureau (1999). Sur la voie d'un développement durable? ["On course for Sustainable Development?"] Federal Report on Sustainable Development. Brussels: BfP, page 153.

possible to reduce CO₂ emissions for a given energy consumption by replacing certain fuels with others (natural gas, for instance, produces less CO₂ per unit of energy produced than coal). But a strategy based on this alone is not sufficient to meet the criteria of sustainable development, since Belgian energy consumption per head is not a figure that could be generalised across the planet, and because the international objective of stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations cannot be achieved solely by substituting one form of energy for another. The policy applied will aim to reduce the consumption of energy in 2010 to 7.5% below the 1990 level; it may be reviewed in the light of developments in technology, the economy or greenhouse gas emissions, for this objective is only the beginning of the practical implementation of a process that must be regarded as long-term. The realisation of this objective will in any case have to take account of the diverse situations of different industries and what can be done to adapt these. The target objective cannot simply be applied across the board, to all economic groups and in all parts of the country.

392. Alongside, and further to, the reduction of energy consumption, the Federal Government will contribute to the development of cleaner or renewable energy⁵²:

393. – by a price policy tending to make the purchase of cleaner energy less expensive;

394. – by a policy of standard-setting for the means of production of renewable sources of energy (wind generators, solar panels, bio-fuels, etc.).

395. The Government will put forward a draft agreement for cooperation among the various levels of government, so as to attain a target for Belgium of better than 2% as the share of renewable sources of energy in domestic consumption of primary energy. a) The cooperation agreement will be based on two notes to be drawn up by June 2001: one will describe the technical potential for renewable sources of energy in Belgium, and the other will set out the costs associated with this potential. b) In June 2001, an interministerial conference on energy will propose a target (for the share of renewable sources of energy in domestic consumption of primary energy) for Belgium for 2003 and another for 2010; both will be above 2%. c) The cooperation agreement will be concluded between the Regions and the Federal Government, following this interministerial conference, in November 2001 at the latest.

396. The third objective is the phasing out of nuclear power. This means in particular Belgium's embarking on a course by the end of which nuclear power stations will begin to be decommissioned as soon as they reach the age of 40 years⁵³ and a moratorium on reprocessing. This scenario is one that is often questioned in the context of the debate on the relationship between nuclear policy and climate policy; the Government accordingly undertakes to draw up a paper justifying this choice. That paper will deal with the following: the global impact of a spread of nuclear energy throughout the world, the long-term prospect for the use of nuclear power, integration of the decommissioning of nuclear power stations within the policy for reducing CO₂ and with changes of consumption patterns, scientific uncertainties in connection with nuclear energy. This paper will be published in mid-2001. All the information available, such as the results of the AMPERE Commission, will be included in this discussion.

397. The following additional and related aims could also be achieved: security of supply, competitive prices, protection of consumers and the environment, access to a minimum level of energy supply for all.

52. As listed in the document "Energy for the future: renewable sources of energy. White Paper setting out a strategy and action plan for the European Community" - COM(97)599 final, 26/11/97: renewable, non-fossil sources of energy (wind, solar both active and passive, solar photovoltaic, geothermal, wave energy, hydroelectric installations other than for pumping, and biomass energy ("biomass" meaning products of agriculture and forestry, plant wastes from agriculture, forestry and the food industry, waste and untreated wood and cork, the organic component of urban waste, as well as bio-gas from the fermentation of biomass).

53. Government Declaration, July 1999.

398. The pursuit of these objectives must be accompanied by the monitoring of a series of additional indicators such as the breakdown of energy consumption by sector or industry and by type of energy, the intensity of energy demand and its elasticity, and the production of radioactive wastes, broken down by type. Among the indicators relevant to the Government's and private sector's proposed solutions, it is also important to watch developments in the price of energy (by type), the level of taxes on the various types of energy, the level of subsidies allowed by the public sector for social purposes, the level of subsidies allowed by the public sector for the development of renewable or less polluting sources of energy, the level of public funding of research by type of energy, and the investments made by the private sector for the development of renewable and less polluting sources of energy.

b. Policies and measures

399. In order to reduce adverse social and environmental impacts and increase economic efficiency, while being careful to preserve or even increase security and diversity of energy supplies, the actions which the Government intends to take within the framework of this Plan go in four main directions: rational energy use (REU), to fit in with the Regions' REU policy, the promotion of renewable sources of energy, the phasing out of nuclear power, and the accelerated liberalisation of the electricity market; all with an eye to the social dimension.

400. The scope available to the Federal Government is restricted on the one hand by the provisions of the Single European Market (price policy, for instance, is limited by the price policies of neighbouring countries), and on the other by extensive Regional responsibilities for energy. The main issues within the Federal sphere of authority are fiscal and tariff policy, part of economic policy (liberalisation of markets, for instance), standardization, the nuclear cycle, and product policy. What is feasible in terms of such Federal tools as taxation and tariff measures is also influenced by what neighbouring countries do. Coordination between the Regions may also be enhanced by initiatives taken by the Federal authorities.

Demand Management

401. The management of energy demand is a matter on which responsibilities are broadly shared between the Federal Government and the Regions. As early as 1994, the National Programme for Reduction in CO₂ Emissions set up a form of cooperation on this theme between these levels of government. A Belgian National Plan on Climate Change is to be operational in 2001 and will further this cooperation. This Belgian National Plan on Climate Change (currently in preparation, see the chapter on Atmosphere) will include a large number of energy measures: it therefore forms an important component in the policy for sustainable development of energy. The Belgian National Plan on Climate Change will spell out targets, detail the measures proposed and their potential contribution, and set forth the means required for their application. It will be based on a scientific study⁵⁴ commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment, as well as on other works funded by the Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (OSTC).

402. Liberalisation of the gas and electricity markets will probably lead to a reduction in the market price for these forms of energy. The Government is seeking to ensure that the liberalisation of the gas and electricity markets leads to real reductions in charges for both citizens and firms, without discrimination or special rates and without prejudice to existing social pricing measures. Care must be taken that price decreases are not entirely swallowed

⁵⁴ Prospective study of greenhouse gas emissions in Belgium from the Kyoto Protocol until 2008/2012, description of measures applied in European countries – final report IW/KUL/VITO–.

up by new taxes, above all for households, given that otherwise support for liberalisation measures (which are socially beneficial) might wither. For the electricity market, the Government will ensure transparency and comparability of pricing systems. This will be done within the regulatory framework for the electricity and gas industries.

403. More generally, the Government will operate a price policy which encourages a REU strategy and will make use of the opportunities provided by its presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2001 to argue for this principle. What generally happens, as described above, is that a fall in the price of energy leads to increased consumption and at the same time reduces the return on REU schemes. The measures advocated for pricing policy are:

404. - the proposed energy/CO₂ tax. This will be argued for by Belgium at European level, not least within the framework of its presidency of the EU. But if, at the end of the Belgian presidency, the decision to introduce this tax has not been taken at European level, unilateral initiatives will be considered, and Belgium will take them provided they do not endanger the competitiveness of Belgian firms and thus employment, above all for the least skilled. Particular arrangements or exemptions could possibly be provided for energy-intensive industries or firms. Whatever the details, revenue from any taxes introduced must in all cases be applied to lowering the costs of employment. An energy/CO₂ tax, and indeed any other measures which might be taken at Federal level, would have economic consequences that vary among and within Regions, given that these have different economic and industrial structures. Non-fiscal compensation measures to correct these inequitable economic consequences, as well as concomitant measures to try to avoid an increase in social inequalities which this type of tax could bring in its wake, ought to be considered at the same time as the measures themselves, and it would be useful if they could also be combined with the promotion of REU ;

405. - Subsidies (or investment deductions) for energy-saving investments. These will be directed particularly towards the most disadvantaged. The subsidies will come from existing REU funds whose mode of functioning will have been adapted to the liberalised electricity market;

406. - reduction or suppression of the tax advantages currently enjoyed by polluting forms of energy (for instance, VAT of only 12% on coal). The feasibility of reducing certain tax advantages (including the tax on heating oil compared to that on DERV fuel) must be studied first. The reduction of tax advantages will need to be coupled with corresponding social measures that enable poorer individuals either to replace their old equipment or to have access to fuel under acceptable conditions.

Supply Management

407. One of the ways in which the contribution of renewable energy sources to total energy production can be raised is to impose a minimum quota of energy from renewable sources on every supplier of electrical power. The Government will request, in the cooperation agreement which it intends to put to the Regions, a quota of at least 3% in 2004, with increases planned for subsequent years. In addition, the Government will work to ensure that harmonised and transparent systems of "green certificates", available for those who produce electricity from renewable energy,⁵⁵ provide a real incentive. The (temporary) continuance of aid to the production of electricity from renewable energy, alongside the "green certificates" procedure, is justified during this period of transition, in which the profitability of investments in renewable energy is uncertain. In the near future it will be necessary to analyse the opportunity for imposing a minimum quota for the distribution of energy products other than electricity which are less harmful to the environment, such as those from renewable sources, methanol or hydrogen.

55 As defined above (paragraph 392).

408. In view of the phasing out of nuclear power under the government agreement, other energy resources and more efficient production of energy (such as Combined Heat and Power - CHP) will have to be developed, and investment in reducing consumption (so-called "negawatts") will be needed. REU falls within the Regional remit, and the Federal government will fulfil a partnership role. An Indicative Plan for electricity generation is also envisaged. A panel of experts (the AMPERE Commission) has been given the task of advising the government. The government will arrange for a detailed debate in Parliament, involving the CFDD and based on the results of the AMPERE Commission, before adopting the Indicative Plan, for which the formal opinion of the CIDD is a statutory requirement.

409. Security of supply implies the maintenance of a strategic stock of oil. The present system is not optimal. The Government will :

410. - review current regulations so as to make them work better;

411. - take the necessary measures so that Belgium at last complies with its international obligations concerning strategic storage of oil;

412. - work out a crisis management scenario for supply and rationing of oil (covering supply interruptions as well as other situations).

413. Security of supply is also necessary in the case of gas and electricity. The Government will:

414. - define public service obligations guaranteeing uninterrupted supply of high-quality energy;

415. - ensure that price formulas continue to take account of the particular situation of our poorest fellow-citizens.

Technology development

416. The Government will, within its sphere of authority, make agreements with particular industries. It will also launch a major technical standard-setting exercise, including the drawing up of regulations for market acceptability which make compulsory the technical standards that are developed. The development of standard-setting techniques, the intensification of controls and, where necessary, the revision of existing legislation (particularly with a view to only allowing the sale of appliances bearing energy consumption labels A-B-C) should be important elements of action by the Federal administration. Making such action effective presupposes an examination of the means of increasing current budget provisions and a reorientation of nuclear research budgets to other budgets and, if possible, the development of alternative systems of finance by means of funds like those which already exist for monitoring the quality of petroleum products. Research into renewable energy and energy efficiency must also be promoted, and here the Government will act jointly with the Regions so as to support their efforts.

417. The energy division of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must make an additional effort to make the best possible use, in central and eastern Europe, of know-how concerning decommissioning of nuclear installations and the management and storage of nuclear waste that has been acquired by Belgian public institutions (ONDRAF, CEN, IRE and Belgoprocess) and private firms in the industry.

Products policy

418. The Government will continue and intensify its actions to guarantee safety, the protection of consumers and workers, and respect for the environment in the production, transport, distribution and consumption of energy. It has an ambitious plan to this effect,

involving considerable financial means and human resources. More particularly, the fund set aside for monitoring the quality of petroleum products, which has already proved its effectiveness, provides a convincing example which could be followed with advantage in this case as well.

419. The Government will carry out the following specific actions:

420. - extension of the activities of fuel inspection at the pump carried out by FAPETRO (the petroleum products analysis fund) to cover bulk deliveries of diesel fuel (inspection of fuel in delivery tankers);

421. - design, through the Belgian Standards Institute (IBN), of detection methods for products resulting from the "laundering" of officially tinted diesel fuel;

422. - inspection campaigns concerning the sales channels for recycled mineral oils (within the limits of Federal authority);

423. - support of and participation in the pilot programme developed in collaboration with the Regions and the industry for soil rehabilitation at the site of abandoned service stations;

424. - support of and participation in the PREMAZ pilot programme, developed in collaboration with the Regions and the industry, for the prevention of soil contamination by leaks from household fuel storage tanks;

425. - preparation of new regulations concerning sale of appliances;

426. - greater emphasis on the inspections conducted by the energy administration in collaboration with the relevant branches of the Economic Inspectorate and the Quality and Safety Inspectorate;

427. - greater monitoring of the market in certain white goods, which is currently swamped with non-compliant, and even hazardous, appliances. The action programme will extend beyond the safety and electro-magnetic compatibility of electrical items to cover the safety of gas appliances, the efficiency of boilers and other consumer energy equipment (beginning with those bearing a label), and the energy labelling of appliances. The advertising and promotion of electric heating will be prohibited, either by voluntary agreements or legislation, following consultation with the industry.

428. Efforts dating back a number of years concerning the management of radioactive waste will be continued, with the aim of achieving results that suit the new orientations of the Government's declaration:

429. - research and development activities;

430. - decisions about the downstream stages of the nuclear fuel cycle (moratorium on reprocessing and decision on the status of spent fuel unloaded from nuclear reactors);

431. - continued financing of the debts of the BP1/BP2 reactors beyond 31 December 2000 on the basis of the agreement of 19 December 1990 between the Belgian government, ONDRAF, Electrabel and Synatom. The Government's aim is to ensure that the State's financial contribution is at any rate not higher than the proportion fixed by the agreement currently in force, and that the electricity industry continues to contribute at least as much as under that agreement.

Public awareness policy

432. In support of the measures presented above, and with the aim of modifying consumer behaviour, there must be promotion of full information (pricing, labelling, comparisons) and

action to ensure its wide dissemination. The models of consumption conveyed by advertising and the media need to be challenged (see the suggestions in the chapter "Actions on patterns of production and consumption"). The Government will study the usefulness of making compulsory in all advertising the mention of the energy consumption of the goods and services advertised and the advisability of publishing comparative listings. The Government will also develop the necessary arrangements so that consumers can become aware of what they consume by means of their energy bills. These bills must be readily understandable and help consumers to control their use of energy. Bills should be more educational, containing comparisons of consumption to that of an economical consumer and/or that of the same consumer's earlier levels. The greatest possible transparency and clarity in energy suppliers' charges, as mentioned above, will also be insisted on in bills. An experimental application of such measures should make it possible to assess their effects. Partnership and coherent alignment with Regional policies on this matter will be sought; this could be included in the cooperation agreement mentioned above.

c. Implementation of the Plan

433. The unit on Sustainable Development created within the Federal Department of Energy at the Ministry of Economic Affairs has an important responsibility in this matter. It will work in close collaboration with the Federal Environment Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment regarding activities which affect the energy sector.

4.2. Policy promoting mobility compatible with sustainable development

4.2.1. Present situation

434. Compared with primary needs like safe nutrition, health and conservation of ecosystems, the need for mobility met by the transport system may be regarded as instrumental. Most travel is undertaken to fulfil other functions (for instance, work, education, leisure, distribution of goods and services, etc.) rather than as an end in itself (except for walks or motorcycling, etc.) If mobility were possible without pollution, resource consumption and danger, and at little expense, then it could be further increased. But since this is not the case, transport should be organised in such a way that these other functions can be fulfilled while resolving the mobility problems connected to their accessibility. The right to mobility (which arises from the necessity of meeting other needs) may not be satisfied at any cost whatsoever, in terms of time taken, of energy consumed or the form of transport used.

435. At present, travel by car and by lorry are both on the increase. Every year, the number of cars in circulation increases (the number of cars per 1000 inhabitants has risen in the 20 years between 1979 and 1999 from 306 to 443 in Belgium) and so does the number of kilometres driven. The choice of means of transport is determined by many factors of which, according to most studies, there are two decisive variables: time taken, and the cost of the trip. Studies have shown that, in daily travel, it is as if every person is seeking to optimise spatial opportunities (i.e., to maximise the distance travelled) subject to the constraints of two 'budgets': a time budget (no more than 60 to 80 minutes per day) and a financial budget (not more than 15 to 20% of income). When people travel, they often consider the private car as the most attractive means of transport, in terms of both the time and cost of a trip. The car offers another advantage: comfort. The choice of the car is also, for some people, a way of improving their social standing. The quantity of goods transported and distances covered are also increasing. The explanation for this increase is not hard to find: by using lorries and vans, firms optimise time, expense and reliability of transport. Thus, individuals and firms both act for the most part as if there was no problem of mobility.

436. And yet everyone complains of the hindrances to the mobility of private cars and to road

transport, of the time wasted in traffic jams, noise and other externalities. Car and lorry accidents cause 1500 deaths a year and 70,760 injuries, of which almost 50% involve people younger than 30 years⁵⁶(see also the chapter "Environmental health policy"). The transport industry produces 15% of greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂), 54% of NO_x emissions, 58% of CO emissions and 47% of VOC emissions. Without policies that actively serve to reduce these emissions, transport and travel will by 2010 be emitting 11% more CO₂ than in 1995. With the forecast rise in traffic, there will be even more and bigger traffic jams. However, such a development is not inevitable. Measures already taken at European level⁵⁷ are expected to produce a reduction of some 70% in emissions of pollutants such as CO, SO₂, and NO_x by 2010 from their 1995 levels; and it is recognised that regulatory or incentive measures can have a major impact. In Belgium, for instance, the proportion of leaded petrol has fallen from 100% to 20% in 12 years,⁵⁸ thanks to a series of measures including an incentive tax difference in the price paid by the consumer.

437. So far, the measures taken have been too few and far between, and too restricted, to lead to major changes. Without active intervention, economic forecasts anticipate a rise in energy consumption of 2.1% per year in transport and travel.⁵⁹To alter the pressures arising from the transport industry will not be easy: first of all, certain potentially effective measures have limited scope because of external constraints, such as the competitiveness of firms or European rules. For instance, the price of fuel cannot be raised far above that prevailing in neighbouring countries. Then again, some citizens are highly sensitive about their freedom to own and use a car.

438. As mobility responds to a secondary need, its modification cannot be an end in itself. The objectives in connection with development of the transport industry form part of the other broad objectives of sustainable development, such as inter- and intra-generational equity, priority for the needs of the less well off, reduction in emissions of pollutants (including CO₂) and conservation of resources. The Government's declaration tackles these subjects and makes a commitment to developing an integrated mobility policy that will lessen environmental and social damage on the one hand and increase the mobility of certain social groups (especially children and the elderly, and those on minimum benefit and low wages) by means of public transport on the other hand. Furthermore, this policy must contribute to improving everyone's mobility and must benefit the economy and employment.

439. Solutions may be found along five paths: controlling the need for motorised travel, making travel safer, technological innovation, more rational use of all means of transport and, finally, encouraging modal shifts.⁶⁰

440. - Getting the need for motorised travel under control involves, among other things, bringing people and the sites of their activities closer together. This can be done, most obviously, by better land use: a matter which involves town and country planning (such policies come within the Regional remit, and accordingly will not be further discussed here). Federal policies concerning the siting of businesses and infrastructure can also have an effect on the need for motorised travel and restriction of its growth. More rational use of all means of transport will allow better performance from the transport system as a whole.

441. - Making travel safer involves protecting vulnerable travellers and influencing driver behaviour by means of appropriate regulations and arrangements.

442. - Technological innovation involves improving engine efficiency and fuel composition, improving vehicle design and replacing conventional engines with new types. The replacement of non-compliant vehicles must absolutely be supplemented by measures for their definitive withdrawal from circulation and recycling (a matter for joint deliberation with

56 INS, 1998.

57 Standart & Poor's DRI – KU Leuven. August 1999, draft final report. p.41

58 EU transport in figures 1998, Eurostat, January 1999.

59 Economic Prospects 2000-2005, Federal Planning Bureau, April 2000, p. 89.

60 Change from one mode of travel to a more environmentally friendly one, for the same journey.

the Regions).

443. - Incentives for modal shifts require making desired travel patterns more competitive than others: more rapid, less expensive, more comfortable, safer and more reliable; accessible to all and as far as possible reaching the entire territory. Encouraging modal shift will also have a beneficial influence on the mobility of the less well off and the infirm.

444. Some solutions that arose in the course of the public enquiry should be studied in greater depth before they are adopted or promoted: (i) teleworking. This does indeed partially solve congestion problems, but its effects on CO₂ emissions are not yet well understood (effect on home heating, on travel in the vicinity of the home, etc.); (ii) reducing taxes on house purchase. The aim is to allow workers to live nearer to their place of work, but the effects of this measure on travel from home to work for two workers in one household, and on leisure travel, are poorly understood;⁶¹ (iii) the development of on-board computer navigation: the objective is to encourage traffic flow, but effects on modal shift are poorly understood (effect on the competitiveness between modes, effects on the choice of travel mode); (iv) challenging the "just in time" principle. The effects on mobility and on its economic consequences are poorly understood.

4.2.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

445. This chapter aims to set out broad options for Belgian transport and mobility policy, taking existing studies into account. The options described below will be converted into a National Mobility Plan (in partnership with the Regions). It will serve as a basis for drawing up a cooperation agreement among the various levels of government, with careful integration of the authority of each in terms of taxation and town and country planning, etc.

446. In order to contribute to the objectives of the Göteborg Protocol concerning reductions in emissions of tropospheric ozone precursors and sources of acidification, and especially in order to give effect to the commitment undertaken by Belgium at Kyoto in 1997 (see the next chapter), the Government is setting a guideline target for CO₂ emissions by the transport industry of 5% below 1990 levels for 2010. The relative contribution of the transport industry would then be lower than the overall target for reduction in CO₂ emissions, reflecting the potentially high marginal cost of these measures. The National Mobility Plan will set intermediate targets for 2001 and 2010, taking account of the financial impact that may be expected for the industries concerned.

447. Modal shift will be the cornerstone of Federal, and all Belgian, government action. For passenger transport, it would make possible a reduction of 5-28% of CO₂ emissions without great loss of comfort or mobility.⁶²

448. - For individuals, the objectives of modal shift in domestic traffic apply first and foremost to commuters, encouraging them to make greater use of public transport or bicycles rather than cars. Travel by public transport and bicycle must therefore be made quicker and cheaper⁶³ than by car and must be improved in terms of comfort and safety. The objectives of modal shift also apply to short-distance air travellers (less than 500 km), encouraging them to take the train and to use alternatives to travel such as telecommunications tools.

449. - For freight, the objectives of modal shift – to encourage interchanges from one mode

⁶¹ It is possible that living nearer work would mean more leisure travel, as inquiries into household mobility have suggested. This needs further study.

⁶² Prospective study of greenhouse gas emissions in Belgium from the Kyoto protocol until 2008/2012, description of measures applied in European countries – final report IW/KUL/VITO – 26/04/99

⁶³ For instance, by encouraging the internalisation of the external effects of each travel mode.

to another - mainly apply to long-distance transport, encouraging firms to make greater use of pipelines, railways and boats rather than lorries and vans (the transport of freight by train and boat must be made more attractive in terms of cost, time and reliability - particularly for rail - than transport by road).

450. In agreement with the Regions, public transport will be made to provide wider coverage of the territory and better frequency. In the social sphere, the Government will make the railways, at least, financially more accessible to young people under 12, to pensioners, to those on low incomes and to the infirm, as well as to civil servants.

451. The Government will continue its efforts to ensure the safety of travel for all.

452. All this means that there are many indicators to monitor concerning transport. The most important of these are: indices of passenger-km by mode and per year, the number of journeys per person and of tonnes-km by mode and per year, the amount (volume-km and unit value-km) for certain forms of freight, emissions of pollutants by mode in tonnes/year, road traffic accident victims, car ownership rate, expenditure on personal mobility by each decile of income, expenditure on advertising and awareness by mode of transport. Indicators of efficiency and of the effectiveness of measures taken in the attainment of the objectives referred to above, especially in financial terms, must also be monitored. Without prejudice to the public service, this applies inter alia to the relative price of public transport and car travel, the amount of investment in public transport, cycling and other modes of transport, and the quality of public transport (punctuality of trains, number of trains per day with demand exceeding the number of seats, connections between train and bus, etc.). It would also be useful to develop an indicator combining a figure for territorial coverage of public transport with an index of average time taken to travel from one place to another by public transport and the demand for transport services on the same route.

b. Policies and measures

453. These objectives involve a considerable (but necessary) degree of active intervention; the Government is accordingly adopting the following strategic measures, whose effectiveness will be linked to their strong coordination.

Demand Management

454. The philosophy behind demand-management measures for the transport industry is to ensure that the price of transport better reflects its external costs.

455. As regards passenger transport, the modal shift of domestic traffic towards more environmentally friendly modes will be encouraged. Measures will aim, among other things, to reform the system that makes commuting costs tax deductible (including provision of parking places at the workplace), to reduce the fixed registration fee for cars (and vary it as a function of their environmental performance) and to increase usage costs of cars, such as the cost of fuel, thus coming more into line with the policies of neighbouring countries (reducing the price difference between diesel and petrol) (see, inter alia, Part 4. Taxation); and to keep VAT at 6% for bicycle maintenance so long as European legislation allows this. Supplementary measures (in support of these) will also be implemented, such as the introduction of Transport & Travel Plans by firms and public administrations with more than 50 staff, the training of drivers in more economical driving techniques, the promotion of car-sharing, and possibly the introduction of a licence-points system and the administrative handling of parking fines. In the social field, public transport will be made cheaper for those under 12 years old, pensioners and the infirm. A criterion will also be worked out for aid to people on low incomes. Modal shift of air travel to rail will be encouraged by fiscal measures (tax on aviation fuel in an international context, higher airport landing fees in the European

context).

456. For freight transport, modal shift will be encouraged by making transport by boat or train economically more attractive than road or air transport, to the greatest extent compatible with measures at the European level. The measures adopted (supplementary to those already described for personal travel) are: restriction of permitted hours of continuous driving for lorry-drivers, banning of freight traffic from the roads at weekends and during rush hours (these to be defined jointly with the industries involved), more effective policing of regulations, and incorporation into the cost of the product itself of external transport costs. Supplementary measures (in support of these) will also be implemented, such as the improvement of transport logistics and the elaboration of a "transport of goods" section in individual firms' Transport & Travel Plans.

Supply Management

457. The philosophy behind supply management measures for the transport industry is that of making modes which are more compatible with sustainable development for distances up to 600 km more competitive (these are: public transport, train, boat, cycle), in comparison with journey times for the private car - above all in towns - or in comparison with road or air journeys for freight. The modes that are more compatible with sustainable development must also be comparatively safer, more dependable and more comfortable. These are largely matters for the Regional governments, so it will be necessary to arrange broad deliberations bringing together Federal, Regional and local authorities.

458. In the case of personal travel, the National Mobility Plan will be directed along the following lines, although its practical measures require more detailed study :

459. - the reduction, in towns, of the space reserved for cars (reduction of parking space, especially on-street parking; reduction of the number of traffic lanes; creation of car-free town centres) and increase in space reserved for the infirm, for public transport (bus, tram), for cycles (creation of slow route networks) and for shared use of cars (car-sharing, car-pooling)⁶⁴. These measures will also promote greater safety for cyclists and pedestrians;

460. - redeploing the supply of public transport outside towns (such as the RER ⁶⁵) but also other trains and buses, increasing territorial coverage and frequencies, ensuring proper intermodal connections, and allowing combinations of modes (cycle + public transport, public transport + taxis). Travel to and from school will be considered;

461. - the creation, on the main commuter routes into towns, of lanes reserved for public transport, cycles and shared cars. Where public transport is sufficiently developed, entry control points can be progressively installed on routes leading into town, for better regulation of access and to limit congestion. "Park & Ride" car parks will be developed, without forgetting parking places for cycles. Road speed restrictions will be promoted;

462. - improved comfort for public transport passengers, especially at interchanges, and improvements in the pleasantness and ease of use of public transport (reservations by Internet, etc.). Improvement in the design of vehicles, buildings and public spaces connected with public transport, both to make them safer and to diminish the risk of violence to women and certain vulnerable categories of people, and to make them more accessible to the infirm;

463. - improvements to the comfort of those living near major transport routes will be the

⁶⁴ Car-sharing [voiture partagée] is the use of the same car by different people at different times and should not be confused with car-pooling [co-voiturage], which is the use of the same car at the same time to go to the same place. Car-sharing deals with the need for a car at a particular time and place, car-pooling to repetitive trips of the commuter kind.

⁶⁵ The RER (Réseau express régional) is a train serving the suburbs of major cities. Time between trains is around 10 minutes.

subject of specific actions (reduction in train and aircraft noise).

464. As regards freight transport, the National Mobility Plan will include the following measures:

465. - the creation of multi-modal arrangements that are efficient from the point of view of total time required for interchanges and their siting. These are mainly Regional matters (town and country planning, investment aid, demand forecasting);

466. - the development of transport infrastructures for rail (SNCB - Belgian National Railways) and boat (Regional governments), bringing environmental considerations into infrastructure planning;

467. - promoting the standardisation of containers and the improvement of their computerised handling so as to reduce empty journeys.

468. In the social sphere, the objectives of reducing prices for target groups must be included in the relevant budgets. The Government will set aside specific amounts for realisation of this objective. The Government will continue to address the question of road safety, i.e., action relating to roads and their surroundings (Regional competence), driver behaviour and vehicle safety. Federal measures will principally deal with the fight against driving while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, increasing spot checks (including speed checks) and more appropriate penalties (the licence points system mentioned above).

Technological development

469. Research and development will be supported. On the one hand, reductions must be achieved in emissions per km travelled, not least by support for research into more economical forms of motive power in vehicles, such as combined and other electric vehicles. Fuel changes are another approach to emission reductions: vehicles running on biomass gases, the combination of fuel and steam, and fuel cells⁶⁶. Research will be undertaken into technical improvements to bicycles. Lastly, an improvement in public transport performance, both in vehicle emissions and their management, will be the subject of further studies.

Products policy

470. Where there exists a technology that is more compatible with development, it is necessary to promote its diffusion and adoption. This is one of the aims of product policy as introduced in the thematic group on changing patterns of consumption. In this respect the Government will promote:

471. - less polluting fuels. This will require transposing into Belgian law the European Directives arising from the "Clean Air" and "Auto-Oil" programmes. The reduction in pollution will be around 70% between now and 2010, according to the EU (see the chapter "Policies for protection of the atmosphere"). The Government will also encourage the use of alternative fuels;

472. - reductions in emissions from diesel vehicles (for instance, by fitting particle filters and catalysers to diesel engines);

473. - the use of certain fuels such as LPG (but not natural gas, which has a poor energy efficiency if the energy required for compressing the gas is taken into account). For LPG, measures will be both regulatory (finding a solution for underground parking spaces) and

⁶⁶ Fuel cells use hydrogen and oxygen as their energy source, or other similar fuels. These react, producing electricity and water. Implementation technology is not yet straightforward.

fiscal (lower taxation). The use of vehicles with lower CO₂ emissions will also be promoted;

474. - more widespread and better technical inspection of vehicles (including the effectiveness of catalytic converters and speed limiters on lorries);

475. - improvement in the environmental performance of aircraft, in terms of energy consumption and gas emissions and of noise. Technical standards for aircraft should be more stringent;

476. - noise reduction. Specific measures must be taken to ensure a substantial reduction in damaging and annoying noise from all modes of transport. Standards must be stricter. The Government will put forward a cooperation agreement concerning Brussels national airport to reduce noise nuisance. Specific measures have already been taken in order to reduce noise nuisance at the airport. The objectives worked on (airport activity, limitation of noise nuisance and promotion of the economy and employment), the approach adopted (consultation with the various parties concerned) and the measures taken in practice (a balanced approach, with clearly established ends and means) may be regarded as an exemplary approach to the policy of sustainable development.

Public awareness policy

477. There must be a real change of mentality among travellers and transport users. Dominant cultural models such as the glorification of individual travel in private cars and vehicle ownership must be challenged. Research will be undertaken in order to be able to ensure the relevant promotion of cultural models which emphasise the benefits of shared transport and 'green' travel (cycling and walking). The National Mobility Plan will contain a strategy of action for this, in particular by: examining the impact of advertising on behaviour (see the chapter on "Action on patterns of consumption and production"), support for labelling of less polluting vehicles, information on behaviour which promotes sustainable development in terms of mobility, support for objective information about environmental and social impact, etc. Travellers' and transport users' associations will be invited to participate.

c. Implementation of the Plan

478. For most of the measures put forward, a good level of scientific understanding has already been acquired. What has been missing until now is clear and precise objectives, a coherent overall strategy, an evaluation of the likely effects of the measures proposed and the deployment of funds on a scale that suits the objectives to be attained. Certain measures have already been put before and discussed in Parliament⁶⁷. However, these have suffered from the defects just mentioned. Those measures, whose impacts have not been determined, have not been implemented.

479. The Regions have declared themselves in favour (with some nuances) of drawing up a National Mobility Plan: now it is up to the appropriate Federal departments to formulate up, in partnership with the Regions and taking account of the European and international dimensions involved. This plan will follow up the options and measures set out in this chapter. The Ministry of Communications and Infrastructure will work out this National Mobility Plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment, the Finance Ministry, and the Regional Ministries concerned (including transport, town and country planning, environment, etc.), as well as public companies that are active in the field of transport and local authorities. A draft National Mobility Plan will be ready in 2001 and will be the subject of extensive consultation.

67 Une politique de mobilité durable.["A policy for sustainable mobility"] Lower House of the Belgian Parliament, 30 April 1999, document n° 2211/1-98/99

4.3. Policy for protecting the atmosphere

4.3.1. Present situation

480. The atmosphere has a chemical composition which results from a fragile balance that has arisen during billions of years of evolution. Air is composed mainly of oxygen (O₂, about 21%), nitrogen (N₂, about 78%) and argon (about 0.93%). Other gases, present in extremely small quantities, are also essential for life on earth and play an important role in major environmental problems. This is the case for the problems of ozone, acidification and the greenhouse effect, which are dealt with in this chapter.



Reporters/Marc Verpoorten

Atmospheric chemistry is the result of billions of years of evolution

a. The ozone problem

481. The presence of the ozone (O₃) layer surrounding the Earth (stratospheric ozone) is an essential condition for life on Earth. Ozone is an unstable gas, formed in the stratosphere by ultraviolet radiation. This layer provides protection from the most hazardous ultraviolet rays. For this reason, the international community has tried for more than 20 years to protect this ozone layer from man-made substances which destroy it: the chlorofluorocarbons and halons. International action should progressively eliminate this global menace over the coming decades. The natural presence of ozone in the stratosphere (not dealt with in this Plan) must not be confused with the undesirable presence of ozone in the troposphere, a matter which is dealt with in the present Plan.

482. Tropospheric ozone is a so-called secondary pollutant. There are gases, known as precursor gases and themselves atmospheric pollutants, which give rise to its formation: nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide and methane. On the one hand, ozone is produced from nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds in the presence of solar radiation. On the other, ozone is brought down from higher layers of the

troposphere (where it forms by oxidation of methane and carbon monoxide in the presence of nitrogen dioxide), so that a considerable amount may be contributed by neighbouring regions and countries. The chemical reactions that produce the formation of tropospheric ozone are extremely complex. It is not easy to assess the contribution of the various precursors of ozone. Transport is far and away the biggest cause of man-made emissions of ozone precursors in Belgium. Next come industrial activities, with their combustion producing nitrogen oxides and their use of solvents producing volatile organic compounds other than methane. Lastly, for methane, agriculture is the main sector responsible.

483. The ozone problem appears during 'ozone episodes', characterised by one or more days of high ozone concentration (above 180 µg/m³). These episodes depend on weather factors (sunshine, high temperature, little or no wind) and on emissions of ozone precursors. The background concentration, currently of the order of 60 µg/m³, is increasing at a rate of 1% per year, though of course it undergoes daily and seasonal variations. This increase leads to more frequent and more intense episodes.

484. The presence of ozone in the troposphere gives rise to undesirable effects on health, plants and materials and equipment. Exposure for one hour to a concentration of around 240 µg/m³ produces visible effects, principally irritation of the eyes and the respiratory system. The effects of chronic exposure can be more serious, and even lethal. But since 'ozone episodes' generally occur during heat waves, these two factors combine to affect mortality. Ozone also has harmful effects on the growth of plants and can thus cause financial losses for farming and forestry. In addition, ozone acts as a greenhouse gas. Finally, ozone causes degradation of certain materials, such as plastics, textiles, pigments and paints. Overall, reductions in emissions by some 70% to 90% are thought necessary to avoid 'ozone episodes'.

b. The problem of acidification

485. Acid rain (and snow) are mainly due to the use of fossil fuels. The sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) produced come in contact with water in the air and turn to sulphuric and nitric acids, which find their way back to the ground and to surface waters, sometimes after having travelled great distances before they fall as rain or snow.

486. The precipitation of acidic substances on to plants, into surface water and on soil has many consequences. The availability of nutrients and the concentration of trace elements may be changed, and this plays a role in forest decay. Aside from forests, acid rain can harm all ecological niches in sensitive areas, especially aquatic organisms. Our cultural heritage, too, built for the most part in limestone, is threatened by acid rain.

c. The problem of climate change

487. The probable short- and long-term effects (in social, ecological and economic terms) of climate change make this set of problems the very essence or exemplar of the problem of sustainable development. A policy on climate change must immediately be adopted at Federal level and integrated into all Federal and Regional policies. It must be promoted for the long term and at international level, with intermediate objectives. Care must be taken that the social, ecological and economic elements of the problem are brought together, and political action on each sector and industry, as well as action which operates across the board, must be the subject of a dialogue with the whole of civil society.

488. Climate change consists of changes in the climate attributable directly or indirectly to some human activity which interferes with the composition of the world's atmosphere. These changes are caused by a strengthening of the greenhouse effect, produced by an increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The main greenhouse gases

responsible for these changes are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, nitrous oxide (N₂O) and halocarbons. These gases trap solar energy in the atmosphere. Without this natural phenomenon, the average temperature on Earth would be around -18°C. But according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the international scientific forum on this problem, it is not likely that the rise in temperatures observed over the last hundred years is exclusively due to natural causes.⁶⁸ These climate changes are therefore an alteration superimposed on the natural variability of the climate observed over comparable periods.

489. According to the IPCC, the share of the various greenhouse gases in directly contributing to climate warming since 1850 is around 64% for CO₂, 19% for methane, 5% for N₂O and 10% for the halocarbons. Tropospheric ozone contributes to climate change as well, but this contribution is less securely quantified. Other types of pollution, such as aerosols, would seem to have a cooling effect on the climate. Exactly how the thinning of the ozone layer affects temperatures is also poorly understood. In Belgium, CO₂ represents 84% of annual emissions of greenhouse gases. Methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) account for 8% and 7% of these emissions, respectively. Finally, HFCs, PFCs and SF₆ together represent less than 1% of emissions. CO₂ emissions are mainly due to the consumption of fossil fuel by all sectors of the economy (90.4% of CO₂ emissions, the rest being generated mainly by non-energy industrial processes in the chemicals and cement industries). Broken down by economic sector and industry, Belgian annual emissions of greenhouse gases are 20% due to activities of energy conversion, 16% to transport and 7% to agriculture: these are the major contributors to man-made emissions of greenhouse gases in Belgium. There are also emissions from fossil fuel energy use in the industrial sector (20%) and industrial processes (11%, other than energy) in the tertiary sector (6%), households (17%) and wastes (3%).

490. Concerning climate change, despite the existence of various studies on the ecological limits of climate change, the international community does not yet have at its disposal any generally accepted reference values capable of being expressed in terms of maximum permissible atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. Since this concentration is constantly rising, international action is aimed at stabilising these greenhouse gas concentrations at a level thought to be safe for the climate system.⁶⁹ This is the ultimate goal of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), which came into force on 21 March 1994 (in Belgium on 15 April 1996) and which has thus far been ratified by over 180 countries. The intermediate objective of the FCCC, for emissions from the developed countries as a group in the year 2000, is to stabilise greenhouse gas emissions at their 1990 level. The Kyoto Protocol, when ratified, will establish a new intermediate objective for the industrialised countries: annual emissions during the period 2008-2012 that are 5% below the 1990 level. Whatever the reference level of greenhouse gas concentrations, a very considerable reduction in emissions will be necessary in order to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations. Stabilising CO₂ concentrations at their current level would require an immediate reduction of 50-70% in emissions. The longer we delay before reducing emissions to this extent, the greater concentrations will become and the higher the resulting temperature increase.

491. Described in terms of increased greenhouse gas concentrations, climate warming and sea level rise, the phenomenon known as "climate change" is world-wide. But the changes it produces are essentially regional in nature and may vary greatly from place to place. Although there are still several areas of uncertainty about environmental changes and their most significant harmful effects, such warming could lead to serious disturbances in some

68 The balance of evidence, from changes in global mean surface air temperature and from changes in geographical, seasonal and vertical patterns of atmospheric temperature, suggests a discernible human influence on global climate . (IPCC, 1995).

69 Article 2 of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992). A certain concentration corresponds to a certain amount of warming. However, there is not yet agreement internationally on the levels of warming and concentrations to be regarded as acceptable. The EU has suggested a limit for warming of 2°C and a limit for increase in CO₂ concentrations of 550 ppmv.

particularly fragile natural ecosystems, resulting in a more rapid loss of biodiversity and, possibly, harmful effects on human health. Some islands could disappear and certain natural catastrophes could increase; there could be a reduction in farming yields in certain regions of the world. The geographical limits of diseases such as malaria could even be extended. Extreme atmospheric conditions, droughts, storms and violent precipitation could occur more frequently. Such phenomena would increase still further the inclination to migrate; to do so might even become a matter of life or death.

492. International action accordingly aims to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases progressively throughout this century. The FCCC (1992) and the Kyoto Protocol (1997) were the first two stages of this process. However, the recent growth observed in Belgium in emissions of the three main greenhouse gases (CO₂, CH₄, N₂O), of around 10% between 1990 and 1997, is in contradiction with undertakings under the FCCC and its Kyoto Protocol. Practical measures are thus called for.

4.3.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

493. The Kyoto Protocol defines targets for six greenhouse gases (CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, SF₆, HFC and PFC). The Protocol requires the industrialised countries as a group to reduce their emissions of the above six gases for the period 2008-2012 to at least 5% below their 1990 levels. For the European Union, the figure required is 8%. This implies that over the period 2008-2012, the countries of the European Union may not produce, altogether and on an annual basis, more than 92% of the amount they produced during the reference year. This reference year is 1990 for CO₂, CH₄ and N₂O and, for the three other gases, a year of the country's choice between 1990 and 1995. The Member States of the European Union have opted, in accordance with the principle of internal burden-sharing, for a differentiation of this 8% target - meaning, for Belgium, a decrease of around 7.5% in its emissions of greenhouse gases.

494. As regards acidification and tropospheric ozone, the Government will see to reducing emissions of SO₂ by 72%, those of NO_x by 47%, those of NH₃ by 31% and those of VOCs by 56% between 1990 and 2010, in order to meet the targets of the 1999 Göteborg Protocol the LRTAP⁷⁰ Convention.

495. Monitoring of these objectives by means of indicators for emissions of greenhouse gases, ozone precursors and acidifying substances must be supplemented by the use of other indicators such as emissions of these greenhouse gas by economic sector and industry, and the concentration of these gases in the atmosphere at world and regional levels. In the matter of measures taken in response to these problems, the Government will monitor, among other indicators, the number of joint implementation projects, the number of CDM projects and the indicators mentioned in dealing with transport, energy and agriculture.

b. Policies and measures

The Belgian National Plan on Climate Change

496. The Belgian National Plan for reduction in CO₂ emissions, adopted in 1994, did not allow the relevant target to be reached (a reduction in emissions by 2000 to 5% below their 1990 levels). The Government has decided that a new Belgian National Plan on Climate Change must be established by the middle of 2001. This Climate Plan will aim to formulate a coherent national policy with sufficient measures, both for individual industries and sectors and across

⁷⁰ Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.

the board, to realise the emission reduction objectives set out in the Kyoto Protocol. The Climate Plan must set clear operational targets by sector and industry and by level of government, along with industry-by-industry indicators, as well as intermediate targets for the year 2003. It must contain measures that are effective enough so that meeting the targets is not too strongly dependent on European initiatives. For this, the Climate Plan must cover all six greenhouse gases (CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, SF₆, HFC, PFC) and must lay down procedures and measures to meet all the other obligations under the Convention, the Protocol, and European Decisions and Directives on the subject. Effort sharing must be based on well-founded discussion. An estimate of the cost of various measures must be made so that they may be ranked in order of their cost-efficiency. These measures must be accompanied by a timetable for administrative implementation. Attention must be paid to the effect of the decisions taken today on emissions in the long term (2050). The elaboration of this Plan must be carried out jointly with the societal actors concerned and with the active involvement of the Regions. Lastly, the Climate Plan must contain specific procedures for proper, regular follow-up and adaptation of the measures envisaged.

497. The legal basis for the National Climate Plan is the obligations arising from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and from EU Council Decision 93/389/EEC concerning a mechanism for monitoring CO₂ emissions and those of the other greenhouse gases in the EU, as amended by Decision 99/296/EC. The Government will ensure that in addition to these international and European frameworks, a clear framework in Belgian law is put in place to support the National Climate Plan, jointly with the Regions and the major societal actors. The national legal framework must be realised by means of a cooperation agreement between the Federal Government, the Regions and the Communities. It must assign the Climate Plan a role in relation to thematic, sectoral and Regional plans and the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development. Specific cooperation agreements must be made between the Federal Government and the Regions where necessary for the preparation and execution of the provisions of that Plan. The legal framework must also make clear the legal scope of the Climate Plan and the degree to which the document is to be public. Lastly, the responsibilities of Federal and Regional departments involved in the coordination and application of the Plan's provisions must be defined. The national legal framework must be supplemented by a general organisational framework to guarantee the preparation, coordination, implementation, follow-up and periodic adaptation of climate policy (see paragraph 537).

The Federal Plan for combating acidification and tropospheric ozone

498. A first Federal Plan on ozone was worked out in June 1996. Some of the provisions of this Plan have been fully put into practice, others not yet. A new Federal Plan for 2000-2003 must be ready by the end of 2000: this plan will take up those measures of the previous Plan that have not yet been implemented and will take account of new international developments. The Ozone Plan will be closely linked with the Regional Plans on the same subject. The Federal Government will suggest to the Regions the integration of Federal and Regional measures in a future single national plan, to tackle both tropospheric ozone and acidification. This integrated approach is justified in that these two problems are also dealt with together at the international level; the reason is that their origin is largely the same (as, indeed, is that of greenhouse gas emissions). In recognition of this, the policy measures proposed will also take into account the synergies among these three atmospheric problems. In order to avoid the gaps of the previous Ozone Plan, it is necessary to create a legal and organisational framework that states the procedures to follow and the structures involved.

499. The Plan for combating acidification and tropospheric ozone will include the measures listed below, which bear specifically on the problems described above:

500. - sign up to major international commitments, first by ratifying the Protocols on NO_x (Sofia, 1998) and VOCs (Geneva, 1991) and, secondly, by signing and ratifying the Mixed

Protocol (Göteborg, 1999) of the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution of the UN Economic Commission for Europe;

501. - transpose the European Directives on transport emissions, viz., Directive 94/63/EEC (petrol storage and distribution), the Directives arising from the European Auto-Oil programme, Directive 98/69/EEC (private car and light goods vehicle emissions), Directive 98/70/EEC (quality of petrol and diesel fuel), and the proposed directives on emissions from heavy goods vehicles and on technical inspections. The Government will make every effort to keep to the deadlines for transposing these Directives into Belgian law;

502. - transpose Directive 99/32/EEC concerning reduction in SO₂ emissions from the combustion of certain liquid fuels;

503. – support the draft directive COM(99)125 on concentrations of tropospheric ozone;

504. - transpose Directive 99/13/EC on the limiting of VOC emissions (Volatile Organic Compounds) arising from the use of organic solvents.

Policy for individual industries and sectors, coordination and integration

505. Besides the components of the National Plan on Climate Change and of the Federal Plan for Combating Acidification and Ozone which deal specifically with these problems, a whole series of coordinated and integrated measures are required for various industries and economic sectors, as well as coordination among the various levels of government, from the local level to the European Union. To support this process of integration and coordination, attention will be drawn to the problems of climate change and to policies on energy, transport and their associated infrastructures, during the annual parliamentary debate on the outlook for sustainable development (see paragraph 647).

506. The energy, transport, manufacturing, waste and agriculture sectors are the main fields of action. Joint deliberation with the Regions is necessary.

507. -In the energy and transport sectors, measures aimed at bringing demand under control and guiding supply on the basis of sustainable development criteria play a crucial role. An Action Plan to review the tax treatment of transport and energy, and a National Mobility Plan, must both contribute to achieving this objective. Still concerning the energy industry, there must be a specific study of the relation between climate policies and product policies, while taking account of energy efficiency at the production stage.

508. -There are also priority measures which must be taken in agriculture and manufacturing. It would be as well, in this respect, to design an active policy for products and production. For instance, production and import of urea-based solid fertiliser will be prohibited, and experimental projects will be set up for organic-based agriculture to return to closed cycles and reduced chemical inputs; an Action Plan will be instituted aimed at reducing emissions of VOCs arising from the use of consumer products. In addition, there will be measures to reduce emissions of NO_x caused by the types of heating installation on the market.

509. -In the waste sector, the Government recommends that treatment techniques be chosen with consideration for their impact on emissions of greenhouse gases, precursor gases and gases contributing to acidification (exclusively Regional competence, but implying a need for cooperation with the Federal authorities and harmonisation with European policies).

510. The Government will provide the signals and impetus needed to promote changes in behaviour and the development of new technologies. For this, it will use the appropriate political instruments (economic instruments, legislation, communication and voluntary agreements), after consultation with the actors in society as a whole.

511. Coordination and integration: A great number of actors in our society are involved in the

problems of atmospheric pollution. Again, the competence for conducting a preventive and remedial policy is spread among various levels of government (from local to European level). To arrive at an effective and efficient result, that policy must take an integrated approach to the different forms of atmospheric pollution. Adequate structures for coordination at each level of government, and among these levels, must be organised. Over the years, a coordination structure has been created in Belgium which, for problems relating to the atmosphere, consists of various working groups. The Coordination Group for the Greenhouse Effect, the Steering Group on the Atmosphere and the Steering Group on Transport and the Environment come under the Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy (CCPIE). Groups such as the Federal-Regional Joint Group on Energy (CONCERE) and the Taxation Group also play an important coordinating role. This coordination must, among other things, ensure that different sectoral plans display a certain unity, so that all levels become more aware and so that climate, ozone and acidification policies may be integrated into all other policies, and vice versa.

512. But it is by no means enough merely for there to be structures for coordination. These structures must also have sufficient resources to guarantee the quality of their work. Also, the mandates for various groups and members must be precise. Lastly, the coordinating groups must benefit from adequate scientific support to enable them to take properly founded decisions. The Government will work at reallocating or increasing financial and human resources and will review and adapt the internal working of the coordination groups to respond to changing national and international conditions. The OSTC must play an important role in the coordination of scientific research as an aid to decision-making.

513. As regards climate change specifically, the Government notes that Belgian national obligations have greatly increased, together with the workload of preparing Belgium's representation at international negotiations. With a view to the Belgian presidency of the EU in the second half of 2001, and considering the major implications of European and international decisions for national policy, the Government intends to strengthen Belgian participation in the European and international negotiating process, in good time for the start of the Belgian presidency. The need to strengthen this capability is recognised and will be the subject of a decision to be taken by the end of 2000. This strengthening must enable Belgian ministers to take initiatives at European level for coordinated policies and measures on energy, transport and public finance. In particular, a permanent official will be designated for each key theme of international negotiations. These officials are to follow closely and take an active part in negotiations within the European ad hoc Group on Climate and the relevant organs of the United Nations (Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice - SBSTA, and Subsidiary Body for Implementation - SBI). They must be supported by a network of experts with a brief from the Greenhouse Effect Coordinating Group. Two or three experts should be appointed for each major theme. This system should make documented papers available to the coordinating groups, in order to define national policy and determine positions in international negotiations. It should also enable the Belgian position in international negotiations to be discussed in good time within the coordinating groups.

Transversal measures on climate change

514. A certain number of policy areas cutting across subject boundaries play an essential role in support to, and implementation of, Belgian policy on climate change.

Scientific research

515. The following strategic measures must be taken in the field of scientific research for the purposes of supporting the policy on climate change. The question of whether PADD II (the Scientific Support Plan for Sustainable Development Policy) must be adapted will be considered:

516. -continue, on the one hand, research aimed at reducing uncertainties and, on the other, research directed at providing scientific support to policy on climate change. There is also a need to stimulate research on the link between the depletion of stratospheric ozone and climate change, and on the role played by aerosols in the stratosphere and troposphere in global warming/cooling. To assist the authorities in formulating integrated policy measures which take account of differing environmental goals, the sectors concerned and various levels of government, the Government proposes to develop integrated impact assessment models in support of policies. All existing studies concerning basic research and policy support must be synthesized;

517. - creation of a scientific centre, along the lines of the one in the Netherlands (NOVEM), that in France (ADEME) and that in the UK (ETSU - Energy Technical Support Unit), with a brief consisting of formulating advice for underpinning policy on climate and energy, so as to increase its effectiveness. The centre must also carry out applied research in fields connected with reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and other polluting gases. Such a scientific centre should make it possible to fill in the gaps in scientific knowledge - essential for a long-term approach to climate change - of certain key Federal administrations (transport, energy, agriculture). The centre must be firmly established as a Belgian institution, so as to guarantee coherence among measures taken by various departments, to be able to formulate useful advice relevant to the Belgian situation, and to reinforce the country's scientific capabilities.

518. Political decision-makers often find it hard to interpret the results of scientific research properly. Researchers seldom direct their investigations in terms of the questions facing decision-makers. The Government will therefore develop a specific interface to translate the results of scientific research into a form which is relevant, usable and understandable for political decision-makers and to precisely formulate the needs of decision-makers for the benefit of researchers. This interface will be an intermediate stage in the process of preparing policies and measures. The interface must be formally established, with guidelines for making explicit the assumptions used in research, the scientific uncertainties and the limitations of results. Establishing these guidelines can be left to the scientific centre, jointly with the various Ministerial departments concerned with these policies. Scientific results must remain one of the elements of political decision-making.

Development Cooperation

519. Climate change is a global problem, requiring global solutions. To that end, all countries must cooperate, under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The Climate Convention and the Kyoto Protocol contain provisions which oblige the industrialised countries to aid developing countries to make their economic and social development sustainable and consistent with the ultimate goals of the Convention. It is also a sensible policy to help them to adapt to foreseeable climate changes. This aid will, inter alia, take the form of transfers of knowledge, technology, financial resources and institutional capabilities. The Government will set the following measures as immediate priorities within the framework of Belgian policy for development cooperation:

520. - transfer, firstly of scientific knowledge needed for formulating national policies on climate change and, secondly, of ecologically rational technologies (according to the needs of the receiving country). Development of the appropriate human and institutional capacities,

and corresponding infrastructures;

521. - evaluation of the impact of development projects on greenhouse gas emissions;

522. - financial support for projects undertaken by developing countries with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, by means of adequate multilateral development funds, such as the GEF (Global Environment Facility);

523. -research on the role which the "Clean Development Mechanism" (CDM) might play within the framework of Belgian development cooperation. It should be noted, in this respect, that financing projects connected with this mechanism is not on any account to diminish existing funds devoted to development cooperation but must come from other sources. The recommendations of the CFDD will be taken into account in research on the role of the CDM.

Inventories and forecasting

524. In compliance with the surveillance and reporting obligations provided for in the Climate Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Decision (93/389/EEC) concerning a monitoring mechanism for CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions in the EU, as amended by Decision 99/296/EC, Belgium is committed to draw up inventories and forecasts on a regular basis concerning greenhouse gas emissions. So as not to depend any longer on studies contracted out to scientific institutions and in order to contribute to a measure of continuity in terms of its reporting obligations, the Government will institutionalise the procedure for drawing up and reporting emissions forecasts, as it has already done for emissions inventories. This can be done by entrusting the task to those Federal offices with the required expertise. The procedure must, however, leave open the possibility of scientific contributions or support from sources other than departmental ones.

Development of policy instruments

Market-based instruments or "Kyoto mechanisms"

525. The Kyoto Protocol introduces three economic instruments enabling countries to trade among themselves in rights to emit greenhouse gases. This involves international trading in emissions, joint implementation and the Clean Development Mechanism. International emissions trading takes the form of an exchange of emission quotas, while joint implementation and the Clean Development Mechanism concern investments in third countries connected with projects that lead to emissions reductions: these then give rise to rights to emission credits. Thanks to these mechanisms, countries in which the cost of reductions is relatively high have an opportunity of buying less expensive emission rights on a large scale from countries where the cost of emission reductions is relatively low. In this way, the same overall quantity of reduction in emissions is achieved at less expense.

526. Research must be undertaken to determine what role the new mechanisms of international cooperation can play within the framework of Belgian policy on climate change. However, the starting point must be the principle that the use of the so-called "Kyoto mechanisms" is supplementary to national measures. Similarly, research into the use of existing policy instruments must be continued. The extent to which these mechanisms are used will be a subject for deliberation with the Regions, as is the case for the National Climate Plan as a whole.

527. The Government will in the course of the next few years be deciding what role these mechanisms can play within the framework of Belgian policy on climate change, taking account of the marginal cost of reductions in emissions and the result of current international negotiations. To prepare the structural measures needed in the long term (after 2012), the

Kyoto mechanisms may be used to supplement national measures for emissions reductions (but must represent less than 50% of the required reductions in emissions).

528. - Research therefore has to be undertaken so as, on the one hand, to determine the volume of reduction in emissions which can be achieved through these mechanisms and, on the other hand, to clarify the arrangements by which these reductions might be organised. To this end, it is advisable to consider integrating the Kyoto mechanisms into the list of existing measures.

529. - Based on an analysis of the properties of each of these three mechanisms, there needs to be consideration of the role they could play (in isolation or together) in climate policy in various future development scenarios under different perceptions of risk.

530. - In order to be able to apply these mechanisms, an institutional and legal framework must be set up on a national (Federal) scale. It will in this connection be advisable to ensure that understanding of these mechanisms is assembled both within the government and in the private sector. Pilot projects will have to be launched, and joint deliberation among the different levels of government and the various actors involved will also be needed.

531. - With a view to associating the private sector with the implementation of these mechanisms (mainly, joint implementation and the Clean Development Mechanism, which are linked to projects), it would be as well to develop methods for stimulating the participation of this sector in pilot projects. Care must also be taken that CDM projects really belong among the development priorities of the host countries.

532. - Belgium, within the European Union, must play a pioneering role in the international negotiations on the choice of selection criteria for reductions in emissions linked to projects (joint implementation and Clean Development Mechanism) and on setting rules for the functioning of the three mechanisms. This pioneering role is important for offering constructive proposals on certain rules, arrangements and guidelines that would be compatible with strict supervision of the effectiveness of the Protocol.

533. - Social and environmental considerations, as well as economic ones, will have a central place in the development of these mechanisms.

Instruments of communication

534. The Government recognises the importance of education, information and public awareness concerning the problem of climate change. For this reason, it wishes the Federal and Regional governments to act together as an energising influence and to take measures to restrict the impact of their own activities, in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, as much as possible. It also wishes environmental criteria to be included in the purchase of vehicles, the construction and renovation of public buildings, the purchase of products containing solvents, etc. (see paragraph 158, on changes of patterns of consumption and production). Further, the authorities must play a role in distributing information to various target groups, in particular via education, in collaboration with the Communities. That information must deal with the causes and consequences of climate change and the actions that those target groups could take to prevent it.

Voluntary agreements

535. The Government wishes to conclude a cooperation agreement with the Regions on a legal framework for national agreements on energy efficiency. This cooperation agreement must, inter alia, establish the procedures to be followed for drafting a convention, which must be in accordance with Regional procedures on the matter. A legal framework is necessary to ensure agreements are followed up. A national legal framework, in addition to existing

Regional initiatives, is necessary because competence on energy efficiency issues is both Federal and Regional. Moreover, the target groups are for the most part organised at national level. The discussions for drawing up this cooperation agreement must involve the CONCERE group. Those negotiations should be completed by the end of 2001.

c. Implementation of the Plan

536. In view of the importance of maintaining a dynamic international policy, the Government wishes the Kyoto Protocol to come into force as soon as possible. For this reason, the time-consuming procedure for ratifying the Protocol must be begun at the earliest possible moment, in order to be concluded at the same time as in other Member States of the European Union. It ought to be possible to finalise this procedure by the end of 2002 at the latest (Earth Summit + 10).

537. The Government recognises the importance, indeed the necessity, of a high degree of integration among the objectives and measures arising from the various departmental and Regional thematic plans that refer to atmospheric problems. The Government has decided to develop a general operational framework that will establish procedures and structures for the preparation, coordination, execution, follow-up and adaptation of the measures in these various plans. This framework must also define the role of the different actors in our society. Lastly, the operational framework must provide for procedures to bring together current studies at various levels of government (Federal and Regional) in order to work out coherent national and Regional plans, taking into account the competence of each. The Federal Energy and Transport Departments, both of which have a key role in the fulfilment of any National Plan concerning atmospheric problems, will, together and jointly with all Federal and Regional departments affected, take initiatives which are to lead, by June 2001, to concrete proposals for an operational framework for atmospheric policy.

PART 3. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

538. A policy of sustainable development requires, as well as practical actions for certain specific themes such as those presented in Part 2, other initiatives concerning 'transversal' policies. These policies relate to the horizontal fields dealt with in Section IV of Agenda 21, "Means of implementation". These fields play an essential role in ensuring and strengthening the coherence and relevance of Federal sustainable development policy.

539. All the relevant Ministries are associated with the preparation, negotiation and follow-up of international treaties within their areas of work. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, assumes a vital role in this field through its embassies and representation at international institutions. A number of Ministries devote part of their budget to scientific research; but it is the Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (OSTC) which is truly in a position to initiate interdepartmental and multi-disciplinary research. For a number of policy areas, recourse must be had to fiscal policy instruments, but within the government, it is the Finance Minister who has the right to initiate measures in this field. For sustainable development, international, scientific and fiscal policies therefore constitute horizontal fields of great importance. It is fitting, then, that transversal arrangements be made for these policies, within whose framework the individual and specific objectives in each of these fields are linked in a balanced way with the theme-by-theme objectives and plans of action described above.

540. The Government also wishes, in this section, to emphasise the importance of information for decision-making. It will be necessary for this purpose to develop and adapt a certain number of instruments within each Ministry. In this first Plan, it turns out that particular attention will need to be paid to the issue of national finance and the elaboration of a series of indicators on the one hand and, on the other, to developing the capacity to make forecasts about the impact of decisions on sustainable development.

1. International policy

541. The concept of sustainable development arises from the need to provide an integrated response to a certain number of international and cross-border problems in the economic, social and environmental fields. For this reason, international policy plays a key role in the present situation. Agenda 21 puts forward a new international partnership enabling conflicts to be resolved peacefully, within a climate of mutual cooperation and solidarity. It also emphasises that the process of development is founded on a dynamic and stable world economy. Agenda 21 identifies three particular fields of work: international instruments and mechanisms, trade and development cooperation. In this first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development, these three aspects are also given centre stage.

542. Related international themes such as conflict prevention, arms control and the regulation of the arms trade, human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, (over)population, migration, traffic in human beings, etc. certainly deserve constant attention and will be incorporated, during the next few years, into sustainable development policy, not least on the basis of forthcoming Federal reports on sustainable development. This is also true of the systematic analysis and evaluation of the impact of national policy at international level, and that of the actions of the international institutions to which Belgium belongs.

543. The fact that many problems require an international solution does not mean that the Government may adopt a passive attitude until such time as a solution presents itself. On the contrary, the Government wishes to make an active contribution to the working out of such solutions. The Belgian presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2001 is one of the opportunities that will be used to the greatest possible extent during the duration of this Plan.

1.1. International instruments and mechanisms

1.1.1. Present situation

544. From the point of view of sustainable development, one of the priorities for international policy is to develop an effective legal framework for the integration of environment and development issues at national, subregional, regional and international levels (Agenda 21; 38-7). For this, it is needful to take into consideration, on the one hand, the further development of international law on sustainable development, with special attention to the delicate balance between environmental and developmental concerns; and, on the other, the need to clarify and strengthen the relationship between existing international instruments or agreements in the field of environment and relevant social and economic agreements or instruments, taking into account the special needs of developing countries (Agenda 21; 39.1 a and b).

545. The foundation for sustainable development as an international issue is Agenda 21 and, within the United Nations, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), of which Belgium is a member. Since the Rio Conference in 1992, the United Nations has organised other summit conferences on particular themes, forming a framework within which links with sustainable development have been established, and indeed strengthened.⁷¹

546. But many other international institutions are becoming increasingly involved in the problems of sustainable development, such as, for instance, the institutions of the European Union (EU), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UN International Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Population Fund (UNPF), the UN Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and even the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

547. The result of this increasing attention is an ever greater number of international treaties and conferences, of procedures and undertakings which explicitly recognise the promotion of sustainable development as an objective or as an overall framework.

548. This is not the place to list all these international treaties and conferences. Some have already been referred to in Part 2 above, and we have already pointed out how complex this international framework is, as a result of the differences among these treaties and other mechanisms in terms of their geographical coverage, constitutional status and arrangements, including for follow-up and monitoring. In the wake of this complexity comes the urgent need for coherence among these various instruments. Though most international institutions have their own specific areas of work and most international treaties are on individual themes, it is possible to detect, not least because of a trend towards a more holistic approach, more and more of points of contact, and therefore possible areas of conflict. In Part 2, we saw the specific importance of intellectual property rights in connection with the Biodiversity Convention, while these rights are also the general subject of another international treaty, in which that specific aspect is not (at present) recognised. Later on in this present Plan, references will be found to the links between the greater liberalisation of international trade (WTO), a certain number of international treaties (UN and other) and some International Labour conventions (ILO). The need for coordination among all these instruments is

71 For further information: Gouzée N., Zuinen N. et Willems S. (1999). Un projet à l'échelle mondiale: le développement durable. ["Sustainable development: a world-scale project"] Planning paper 85. Brussels: Federal Planning Bureau.

becoming more and more acutely felt, at national as well as at international level.

1.1.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

549. International institutions, and the secretariats of the various treaties and Conventions should improve dissemination of information and work more closely together. That said, overall coherence must primarily be provided by the countries themselves, as members and paymasters of the institutions or as negotiating parties and signatories of Conventions. National representatives must develop clear and coherent visions and thereby avoid contradictions at the general assemblies of the various institutions and the conferences of the parties to the various Conventions. Circulation of information, consultation and coordination at both international and national level are extremely important. They are in fact the preconditions for effective preparation and reliable follow-up of the substantive decisions that must be taken at international level in order to create a functional legal framework for sustainable development.

550. The European Union has a special place in this. In the Treaty of the European Union, there is explicit reference to sustainable development and to the obligation to integrate environmental considerations in other policy areas. Within the European Union, as clearly shown in Part 2, there is an impressive arsenal of directives and regulations concerning the environment, energy, the internal market, industry, agriculture, fishing, etc. At the same time, discussions are being held with a view to coordinating fiscal and social policies so as to avoid any kind of illegitimate competition between Member States in these fields. In addition, a decision was taken at the 1998 Cardiff summit to carry out a biannual examination, at the summit meetings of Heads of State and Government, of the degree of integration of environmental considerations in a number of fields. Such a regular and analytical study, promoted at the highest political level and in line with Article 6 of the Treaty of the European Union, constitutes an important challenge. It must be further developed from the point of view of sustainable development, so as to include economic, social, international and participatory aspects, as well as ecological concerns.

b. Policies and measures

551. Belgium will ensure, at the international level, that the concept of sustainable development is widely raised at other United Nations conferences and other international institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. The Belgian presidency of the European Union (second half of 2001) will establish in practice the conditions for a successful international "Rio + 10" conference in 2002. The conference on Financing for Development organised for 2001 by the United Nations will be an opportunity to argue for an integrated approach. Not only the economic aspect of development, but also the social and environmental aspects, must be considered. The involvement of the World Bank and the IMF in this project also requires that Belgium establish the best possible internal coordination among the various branches of government responsible for relations with these two international Bretton Woods organisations. Belgium will work to ensure that these international organisations comply with their specific undertakings in terms of sustainable development, and carry them out in practice.

552. At the pan-European level, Belgium will pay particular attention to the Aarhus and OSPAR Conventions. The former, the Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters, is not merely an instrument of environmental policy but is equally important for making it thoroughly democratic. For this reason the Government will as soon as possible take steps to transpose

all the elements of this Convention into Belgian legislation and to ratify it. The signing, ratification and implementation of the Convention must also receive full attention in bilateral and multilateral relations with central and eastern Europe. In addition, the ratification and implementation of the OSPAR Convention for the protection of the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic, of which the North Sea is a part (see Part 2, "Protection and management of the marine environment") must receive greater attention. This Convention, based on the precautionary principle, provides for taking legally binding decisions and touches upon many of the policies which are fundamental to pollution from land-based sources.

553. Belgium will make a special effort, not least in view of its presidency of the European Union, to ensure that all European directives are transposed into Belgian law in a proper and timely manner. Moreover, the Government will actively pursue a policy of applying the Cardiff decision in all policy areas and for all aspects of sustainable development (environmental, social, and economic; but also institutional, international, participatory and long-term). In this context, the Government will, inter alia, work to introduce at European level an impact assessment procedure for decisions on sustainable development (see the chapter on "Evaluation of the impact of decisions on sustainable development for the purposes of decision-making"). Jointly with the Communities and the Regions, it will establish a list of priority actions for furthering sustainable development during the European presidency; this list will take account of work in progress at the moment.

554. In view of the central role of international policy within the framework of a strategy for sustainable development, the Government will redouble its efforts to inform the population and raise awareness about this subject. Moreover, it will continue to associate the major social groups with the preparations for international conferences and negotiating rounds and will in full transparency publish the positions it intends to adopt, or have its representatives adopt, at international fora.

c. Implementation of the Plan

555. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been given an important mission of coordination, which consists in relaying items on the international agenda to the national level and passing on national events and issues to other countries. Within the framework of this mission, the Ministry is making use of expertise in the competent governmental departments, its own understanding of international affairs, its relations with other actors and its overall view of events. Other bodies for deliberation and coordination are also important, among them the Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy (CCPIE), whose secretariat is provided by the Federal environment agencies. For most of the treaties, there is also, of course, a specific department actively involved in the process.

556. Adequate resources must be made available to develop international instruments and mechanisms and to ensure their coherence from the point of view of sustainable development: these must cover preparation, negotiation, transposition into domestic legislation, and follow-up, in a coordinated and concerted manner. The Government will therefore make available the necessary material and human resources for these purposes. This applies to both the appropriate offices of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy (CCPIE) and the CIDD, and to specialised departments.

1.2. International trade

1.2.1. Present situation

557. Agenda 21 emphasises the importance of an open, equitable, secure, non-discriminatory and predictable multilateral trading system that is consistent with the goals of sustainable development and leads to the optimal distribution of global production (Agenda 21; 2.5). A multilateral commercial system, of an open nature, allows a more efficient allocation and use of resources, thus contributing to increased production and earnings and alleviating pressures on the environment (Agenda 21; 2.5). Trade policies and policies for the environment ought therefore to be mutually reinforcing. Preferential access to markets and reasonable prices for their products also offer the developing countries opportunities for real economic and social development. Provided certain ecological, social and economic conditions are respected, free trade contributes greatly to sustainable development of the planet.

558. Since World War II, a continuous evolution has been evident in international treaties and agreements in the direction of a liberalisation of trade. Important milestones along this road are the GATT, signed in 1947, the Marrakech Agreement and the creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1994. The Marrakech Agreement is not the end of this process. Ever-greater globalisation of the economy in fact creates an increasing number of points of contact, and accordingly of possible areas of conflict between international trade and other policy areas, such as protection of the environment, social progress, control of the food supply, intellectual property rights, etc. It is proving increasingly necessary to set international trade in a wider context and thus ensure a greater coherence between the policy of the WTO and that of other international institutions.

559. In this wider context, there is no doubt that it is time agreement was reached at international level on the relation between free trade agreements and multilateral environment conventions, on strengthening the contribution of international trade to the economic and social development of developing countries, on the relation between free trade and increasing flows of direct foreign investment, on the role of financial markets, and lastly, on criteria for and means of setting a limit to (the pursuit of) the liberalisation of international trade. In this respect, a concrete example is provided by the strong dependence of many developing countries on raw materials.

1.2.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

560. At the WTO, the themes of free trade must be negotiated within the framework of the principles of sustainable development. For this, the internal workings of the WTO must be reviewed together with the developing countries. It will be necessary to assess the impact of the implementation of WTO rules on sustainable world development.

561. A Trade and Environment Committee has been set up within the WTO, charged at Marrakech with drawing up a report and recommendations concerning the relations between trade and the environment at subsequent biannual ministerial meetings. These environmental and sustainable development elements must be incorporated into the whole of the WTO's functioning, as well as into future negotiations, while still taking the WTO's specific mission concerning international trade into account.

562. The collaboration between the secretariats of the WTO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the appropriate organisation for labour standards, must be continued and

strengthened. This collaboration must result in a greater coherence, in practical terms, between these two organisations as regards the social dimension of international trade.

563. The WTO must examine how the developing countries, particularly the least developed, can gain a larger share of international trade under conditions offering them the best development prospects. In the longer term, the actions of the WTO and the interventions of the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank and IMF) must demonstrate more coherence. In view of the marginalisation of the least developed countries in the international trade system, it is advisable urgently to reconsider the problem of raw materials. UNCTAD could be given a mandate to do this.

564. In addition to these international points of emphasis, Belgium can also take immediate and unilateral steps in the right direction. Without prejudice to the division of responsibilities concerning foreign trade between the European, Federal [Belgian] and Regional levels, it is possible to pay more attention to environmental effects and to compliance with the fundamental ILO Conventions, within the framework of export and overseas investment projects which enjoy State support.

b. Policies and measures

565. The Government will continue to make every effort to bring about full participation for developing countries within the WTO. It will pay particular attention to the least developed countries. In practical terms, it will give its financial support to sustainable development and strengthening the capacities of the developing and least developed countries within the framework of trade treaties, so as to remove the current administrative and institutional difficulties in the way of negotiating and applying trade agreements. Representative organisations from civil society will be associated with this project. The Government fully supports the commitment undertaken by the European Union at Seattle and confirmed at the Tenth UNCTAD in Bangkok of removing, from 2002, quota requirements and import duties from least developed country exports.

566. The Government will continue to make every effort to bring about full participation for developing countries within the WTO. It will pay particular attention to the least developed countries. In practical terms, it will give its financial support to sustainable development and strengthening the capacities of the developing and least developed countries within the framework of trade treaties, so as to remove the current administrative and institutional difficulties in the way of negotiating and applying trade agreements. Representative organisations from civil society will be associated with this project. The Government fully supports the commitment undertaken by the European Union at Seattle and confirmed at the Tenth UNCTAD in Bangkok of removing, from 2002, quota requirements and import rights from least developed country exports.

567. Belgium will endeavour to ensure that conflicts which may arise in future between international trade agreements and multilateral environmental treaties are resolved with a view to sustainable development. Belgium will argue for and seek to obtain a multilateral agreement on the introduction of label schemes and labelling for the purposes of sustainable development, both for products and production methods, with consideration given to both social and environmental aspects. In addition, Belgium will provide developing countries the technical assistance they need in this area.

568. Belgium will also contribute to reinforcing the coherence between WTO rules and trade treaties on the one hand and multilaterally accepted social rules on the other hand. In the



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The government will seek to ensure respect for international social standards

present instance, these include the fundamental labour standards of the ILO, public health regulations and the whole range of social policies dealt with at the World Social Conference at Copenhagen. The Government will also be demanding that the secretariats of the ILO and the WTO jointly examine the mechanisms under which sanctions can be imposed for failure to respect basic, universally accepted social rights such as the prohibition of child labour. As the Government's declaration says, Belgium will take the initiative in acting legally and extraterritorially against violations of any fundamental social rights by Belgian nationals.

569. Enforcement of social and environmental standards should not lead to unjustifiable protectionism or work against improved access to free markets for the least developed countries. As an alternative to sanctions, the emphasis should be on support to positive developments. In line with this, the Government, as its declaration states, will shortly be taking steps to promote goods produced in a socially responsible manner. There will also be a study, in collaboration with organisations representing civil society and industry, of possible ways to develop and promote fair trade and to enforce the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and voluntary codes of conduct for firms and sectors, following the example of the clothing industry.

570. Lastly, the Government will supply the necessary resources so that the authorities charged with coordinating international trade policy can ensure a greater convergence of the multilateral trading system with in general and international environment agreements in particular. Moreover, these authorities will assess the feasibility of introducing sustainable development impact assessment prior to a government loan or other measures of financial support to Belgian firms exporting to or investing in a foreign country, based on a statement of environmental effects already filed by the firm; this study will take account of the administrative and financial implications of such a measure.

c. Implementation

571. Given that foreign trade policy is a European competence and Belgian foreign trade a Regional competence, while financial and multilateral operations are a Federal concern, it would be advisable to establish or reinforce consultation and coordination among these various levels of government. For this, it is necessary at the national level to ensure a structural link with the environment, social norms and development, by systematically bringing the competent departments and civil society (CFDD) into this consultation.

572. In view of the central role of international policy within the framework of a strategy for sustainable development, the Government will redouble its efforts to inform the population and raise its awareness about this subject. Moreover, it will continue to associate major social groups with preparations for international conferences and negotiation rounds, and will in full transparency publish the positions it intends to adopt, or have its representatives adopt, at international fora.

1.3. International cooperation

1.3.1. Present situation

573. Despite the spectacular growth of revenue at the international level over the second half of the 20th century, the absolute number of poor has grown by 18% during the same period. It is estimated that 1.3 billion people survive on less than 1 dollar per day. These conflicting trends are not observed only between poor and rich countries; they exist within individual countries as well. Moreover, the marginalisation of certain groups in the population and the feminisation of poverty have increased greatly. The moment has therefore come to make a radical but well-considered choice for a form of international cooperation that counters these divisive tendencies. Development cooperation can only be one component of this necessary international cooperation, which must be directed at sustainable international development. The international environment treaties referred to above, together with international trade, also play a role. Development cooperation, international environment treaties and international trade must all be developed and applied in a coherent and mutually supportive manner..

574. Within the framework of sustainable development, it is also important to transform "aid", as it used to be, into "cooperation", based on a real partnership which among other things recognises each culture's distinctive identity. This involves not merely dialogue with official representatives of the partner country, but also support for and dialogue with the social movements that organise populations and interpret their needs within various decision-making processes. Similarly, it is advisable when preparing and implementing policy to ensure the involvement of, and opportunities for contributions by, the various Belgian social groups, by means of the Federal Council on Sustainable Development and in other ways.

575. Agenda 21 argues for strengthening international cooperation in order to support and supplement efforts by lower-income countries (and above all the poorest countries). Agenda 21 leaves no doubt that in order to move towards sustainable development, the poorer countries need a great deal more in the way of financial resources. Grants of concessionary forms of aid must be made available by the industrialised countries on the basis of sound and balanced criteria and indicators which tally with sustainable development. It is also important to tackle the problem of developing country debt and the aid funding to help resolve certain environmental problems of an international character (climate change, oceans, etc.).

1.3.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

576. The idea of a specific target for the level of public development cooperation was already put forward in 1969, in the report of the Pearson Commission. This UN Commission proposed as a target for 1975 that countries assign 0.7% of their Gross National Product (GNP) to be spent on development cooperation and that this percentage be measured on the basis of expenditure for official development assistance, as defined by the OECD Development Aid Committee.

577. Since then, other objectives for development cooperation have been formulated at various United Nations conferences: these include a 50% reduction in the number of people living in conditions of extreme poverty in the developing countries, the general availability of primary education in all countries, and a 2/3 reduction in the infant mortality rate (deaths under five years) in all developing countries by 2015. These objectives all provide practical indicators allowing progress to be measured over the coming years. As a member of the international community, Belgium has signed on to all these objectives.

578. Transparent decision-making, monitoring of implementation and a regular reporting process, both by the Belgian public authorities and all Belgian and foreign partners involved, are essential ingredients of international cooperation. Like information and discussion on the causes of underdevelopment and poverty, these elements contribute to public awareness and a strengthening of public support for this policy.



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The evaluation of the environmental impact of development cooperation is important

b. Policies and measures

579. The Government will, as a matter of priority, complete the reform of Belgian international cooperation on the basis of the Act of 21 December 1998, which created the Belgian Technical Cooperation Agency as a public corporation, and the Act of 25 May 1999 concerning Belgian international cooperation. The structures, priority policies and approach of Belgian development cooperation will then rest upon a solid and transparent base. The authorities charged with preparing and evaluating policy will be incorporated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and International Cooperation, in recognition of the particular qualities of international cooperation, and coordination within this Ministry as well as the coherence of activities abroad will be strengthened. At the same time, the interdepartmental Working Group on Development Cooperation, which includes representatives from all the Federal departments, will work on the impact of Belgian policy on developing countries and will formulate proposals for coordinated action on behalf of these countries.

580. Although Belgian Governments have subscribed to the 0.7% target on a number of occasions, official Belgian development aid has only reached 0.37% on average during the 1990s. A serious effort must be agreed on immediately to more than double the current amount of aid in absolute terms, within a reasonable time. The Government undertook, immediately on taking office, to reverse the current trend and move once more in the direction of the target of 0.7% of GNP, by increasing the resources available for international cooperation progressively and substantially (Governmental Declaration of 14 July 1999). To attain this objective, the Government will progressively and substantially increase, on an annual basis and from 2001, Federal state credits devoted to development cooperation.

581. The Government's Declaration links this increase in resources with a qualitative improvement and increased relevance of expenditure on development. From now on, resources will be targeted and will take account of costs. Overall, this policy must fit into the framework of a strategy of sustainable development in which combating the causes of poverty and supporting and strengthening respect for human rights and the involvement of civil society play an essential role.

582. Strategic notes on priority sectors and countries for Belgian development cooperation will be determined by reference criteria, so as to give practical expression to the plans of action for sustainable development. The various ways in which the capacities of individuals, groups and administrations can be strengthened must constitute the essential thread running through all the various programmes. Belgium will be studying the concept of ecological debt and the feasibility of applying it in policy. Meanwhile, it will make a major effort to introduce forms of sustainable development impact assessment within the framework of international cooperation and in support of comparable moves by its partner countries.

583. In accordance with the government agreement, Belgium will be arguing in international fora for untied aid (an end to the granting of development aid conditional on the purchase of goods or services from the donor country). Untied aid offers better guarantees in terms of value for money, transparency and efficiency. Moreover, it offers the opportunity to spend these resources locally or in other developing countries. While awaiting general recognition of this principle, Belgium will take steps to put it into practice along with other donor countries which subscribe to it.

584. In continued support of such steps towards untied aid, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation will enter into dialogue with Belgian firms so as to identify which of these would be in a position to make a specific contribution to development cooperation by subscribing to the concept of sustainable and ethical entrepreneurship, agreeing to carry out technology transfers, and providing technical training and expertise. This will put in place practical substantive cooperation with Belgian firms by means of a private sector

development programme.

585. Belgium will contribute actively to debt relief for the poorest and most highly indebted countries (the Highly Indebted Poor Countries - HIPC - initiative). It is, in this respect, of the utmost advantage that these initiatives be supported by sound micro- and macro-economic policy in the countries involved, to the real benefit of structural measures to combat poverty. Where necessary, this process must be accompanied by specific aid to strengthen country capacities in this matter.

586. During negotiations on the upcoming replenishment of the international funds for environmental finance (the Global Environment Facility - GEF - and the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol), the Government will be urging that these be strengthened and will increase Belgium's contribution. Over the coming years, part of the increase in resources for development cooperation that has been announced will be devoted to multilateral projects within the framework of debt relief and the global environment funds.

c. Implementation

587. The new Directorate-General for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade and International Cooperation bears a heavy responsibility, since it has the task of preparing these policies. The Belgian Technical Cooperation Agency is responsible for carrying them out.

588. It is clear, however, that other Ministries must be involved, since they have specific knowledge about particular sectors or can offer assistance in carrying out certain projects. One example is the integration of the Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (OSTC) into scientific support to policy and strengthening of the scientific capabilities of developing countries.

589. The interdepartmental Working Group on Development Cooperation will also contribute to practical application of this part of the Plan. Lastly, as has been emphasised already, multilateral organisations, NGOs, universities, firms and trade unions will all be associated with drawing up and implementing this part of the Plan.

590. In view of the central role of international policy in a strategy for sustainable development, the Government will redouble its efforts to inform the population and improve its awareness about this subject. Moreover, it will continue to associate the major societal groups with preparations for international conferences and negotiation rounds, and will in full transparency publish the positions it intends to adopt, or have its representatives adopt, at international fora

2. Science policy

2.1. Present situation

591. The importance of scientific knowledge, the application of the precautionary principle in cases of uncertainty, and the need for scientific support for policy choices constitute a thread which runs through the whole of the present Plan. The precautionary principle and recognition of scientific uncertainty in fact represent two of its five basic principles. The guidelines at the conclusion of the Plan call upon the scientific community in several cases. In the preceding section, each thematic chapter has noted an increased need for research and for better understanding of environmental, social and economic systems and of the links between them.



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Scientific research should aim at the acquisition of essential knowledge on society and nature

592. For this theme also, the Plan is part of the continuation of Agenda 21. At the outset of its chapter 35, on science, Agenda 21 states that one of its roles is to provide information to better enable formulation and selection of environment and development policies in the decision-making process. To meet this requirement, Agenda 21 considers it indispensable to enhance scientific understanding, improve long-term scientific assessments and strengthen scientific capacities. This demands a reorientation of resources and research. Scientific knowledge must be widespread and accessible to the general public. The interaction between science, policy and society must be improved. At the same time, an approach which complies with the precautionary principle is necessary: in the face of risks of irreversible degradation of the environment, it is not permissible to plead the absence of exhaustive scientific knowledge as a pretext for putting off actions for which there is good justification. The scientific component also contains an international dimension, connected to the

importance of supporting the scientific capability of developing countries. Lastly, it is advisable to seek connections among new needs for scientific knowledge.

593. The Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (OSTC) manage, at Federal level, a large part of the budget devoted to research. The first Scientific Support Plan for Sustainable Development Policy, in 1997 (PADD I), contributed to generating an impetus in scientific research in the direction of sustainable development. This impetus must be strengthened. For this reason the Government has adopted PADD II. However, the Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (OSTC) are not the only players in this field of research: other departments also have budgets for the subject. Unlike OSTC programmes, which are approved by the Council of Ministers and result in the creation of steering committees including representatives of the various departments concerned (Federal, Regional, Local), we have less information on research carried out by other departments or contracted out by them. The Regions, the Communities, the European Union, other international institutions and the private sector also finance research. Consultation, cooperation and the dissemination of information play an important role in this regard.

2.2. Action Plan

2.2.1. Strategic objectives

594. Without prejudice to other objectives, scientific research must be directed towards acquiring essential knowledge about society and nature. Within the framework of this research, we need to question our current patterns of consumption and production and to suggest alternatives. The concept of sustainable development must be brought to the fore.

595. Also in connection with sustainable development, research must provide a framework for the preparation, follow-up, analysis and evaluation of policies. It is appropriate in this respect to design programmes of research which provide practical and effective answers to questions relating to sustainable development policy and the complexity of policy choices (integration of the economic, ecological and social dimensions; multi-disciplinary approaches, etc.); this applies to both domestic and international policy (preparation for and application of conventions, directives and protocols). An effort must be made to find a balance between basic research and research directed at political decision-making, within the framework of PADD II.

596. Scientific knowledge should not only be integrated into policy. Citizens must also be made aware of it. Each citizen should command the tools to understanding which enable informed choices to be made. Research must contribute to public awareness and the debate which must be carried out within society. This requires an active dialogue between scientists and the population.

597. The reorientation of research towards sustainable development means greater transparency, consultation and exchange of information and knowledge. In view of the important implications for society of research into sustainable development, research themes should be chosen and results obtained in a transparent manner. This openness is also important because of the necessary coordination among the various institutions concerned. Since the industrial world is the greatest paymaster of scientific research, it can also play an important role in this. It must be persuaded to orient the research it finances towards sustainable development. There is also a need to promote coordination and communication among scientists (among disciplines, with a multi-disciplinary approach and cross-disciplinary reference, cooperation among universities and within individual universities). Science policy must also contribute to sustainable development on an international scale, by promoting better integration of teams of scientists in an international framework and supporting international networks. Transparency, communication and public financing must together

guarantee the independence of research.

2.2.2. Policies and measures

598. The Federal Interministerial Committee on Science Policy will suggest the government develop a reference framework for the reorientation of scientific and technological research for sustainable development. This reference framework is essential both for the development and evaluation of Federal science policy and for the lead that must be given in joint deliberation with other levels of government and with the private sector. Civil society will be associated with the determination of these criteria and their follow-up. The basic criteria for such a framework are, inter alia, an emphasis on interdisciplinary research (because of the need for integrated results), intensification of research designed to assist political decision-making (in its various stages), and attention to research conducted under differing timetables..

599. The OSTC will take the necessary steps to strengthen coordination and cooperation both at the Federal and among various other political levels, as well as with the private sector. It is important for this purpose that the results of research be distributed in a flexible way to all those concerned. In future, new Federal projects and programmes of research will follow directly, where appropriate, upon the Action Plans that appear in the present Plan, both in terms of their content and in approach and time-scale. In order to be in a position to follow developments in this problem area, the OSTC will, among other things, establish an annual inventory of all current research projects and of the credits which, over the previous year, have been allocated by Federal departments, administrations and public bodies to scientific research for sustainable development. This official public budget devoted to research and development will in subsequent years be able to serve as an indicator to measure the effort that has been agreed at Federal level in this overarching policy field.

600. A multi-disciplinary approach will be encouraged. Structural barriers which hinder an interdisciplinary approach, such as structuring review bodies by specialist disciplines, will be eliminated wherever appropriate. Within the framework of scientific education, specialisation must be accompanied by cross-disciplinary training emphasising communication between different disciplines. Moreover, active participation of scientists in social debate should be encouraged, possibly by means of structural changes, even outside their own field of research, and at all levels of education.

601. The Government will see to the gathering of the relevant data and develop the necessary procedures for the emergence of research that is designed to assist political decision-making, including the development of indicators.

602. Because of the importance of scientific research and its results, communication with civil society and citizens, and their participation, must be improved and strengthened. Structures must be developed



Scientific research is an essential support for political decision making

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to that end in the academic world, to encourage and assess, in the course of researchers' careers, their achievements in increasing popular understanding and social communication.

2.2.3. Implementation

603. Those mainly responsible for research carried out in the general area of sustainable development are, clearly, the Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (OSTC). Nevertheless, other Ministries have a general responsibility through consultation and coordination, and more specifically through their own scientific research (in-house or contracted out). At the same time, it would be advantageous to make the most of the consultative function of the CFDD concerning science policy, for the identification of indicators among other things.

3. Fiscal policy

3.1. Present situation

604. Traditionally, the fiscal system is designed primarily to guarantee stable financing of public administration. For a number of years, this function of raising finance has been accompanied by social and economic objectives. In economic terms, taxes serve, inter alia, to stimulate or restrain certain activities: for instance, reductions in or exemptions from taxes so as to promote certain investments. Progressive personal taxation, taking household incomes and/or composition into account (among other things), and providing for income-related but capped reductions and exemptions, give the fiscal system a social function of redistribution.

605. The fiscal system is not only a source of finance but also an instrument of policy, which can cause changes of behaviour by its impact on the purchasing power of citizens. However, prudence must be maintained using this instrument. Preferential regimes can in fact work against the function of redistribution and that of raising public finance. They do not affect the less well-off, who already pay little or no tax. They make the overall system less than transparent and difficult to control. Fiscal instruments must therefore be simplified and restricted to those policy areas for which they are clearly suitable.

606. In recent years, there have been further adjustments inspired by environmental concerns; this has mainly taken the form of the introduction of environmental taxation by the Regions. A number of actors have asked that this "green" reform of taxation be extended. Two observations lie behind the need to institute green taxation:

607. - it is becoming apparent that market mechanisms are not sufficient to ensure that producers and consumers take account of environmental costs when making decisions (see part 2. Chapters on Consumption, Transport and Energy). Nature, water and air are still too often misperceived as costless and abundantly available goods, and the environmental costs connected with their use are still too frequently passed on to other parts of society, other countries or future generations (Agenda 21; 8,31.a). Some forms of indirect taxation, inter alia those based on the polluter pays principle, can serve to remedy this situation;

608. - at the same time, current systems of finance burden employment through elevated fiscal and parafiscal charges, which explains its relatively high cost. This provides the context for the Government's clear intention to achieve one of the main proposals in the government agreement, a continuous lessening of fiscal and parafiscal pressure throughout the life of this Parliament. It is necessary to take political initiatives to designate alternative sources of financing, by which charges on labour could be reduced with the primary but not sole aim of stimulating employment among the less skilled (see the chapter on Combating poverty).



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The government will seek to integrate sustainable development objectives in the tax system

609. In this plan, the Government is specifically concerned with the "green" aspects of taxation. Quite apart from the "green reform" aimed at in this Plan, the fiscal system has for many years now been attracting criticism about the amount of overall taxation that is fair (both for firms and individuals); the comparative taxation of employment and of capital; the share of direct as opposed to indirect taxation; whether certain adjustments and certain tax incentives should be introduced, and if so to what extent; and how to combat tax fraud. Current tax questions clearly go far beyond the field of eco-taxation; but for most of these other aspects, the Government refers to its reform of personal taxation, which it intends to bring forward in autumn 2000.

610. The sustainability of a fiscal system cannot be assured if it discourages private initiative, for this is an important engine of economic development; nor if it jeopardises social cohesion. The measures put forward in this Plan will also have to take account of the government's policy concerning administrative simplification.

3.2. Action Plan

3.2.1. Strategic objectives

611. Taxation (like insurance premiums, user charges, deposits, etc.) is one of the economic instruments which must be used, in conjunction with other instruments, to ensure that social and environmental costs are incorporated in the total cost of economic activities. In this way, prices will better reflect the relative scarcity and absolute value of natural resources and the

ultimate impact of human activities on the environment. Similarly, it is advisable to eliminate existing incentives which work against the attainment of sustainable development objectives.

612. Where a supplementary tax is the most suitable instrument for an ecological purpose, the revenue it generates will be used to lower the tax burden on employment.

3.2.2. Policies and measures

613. The Government will see to the better incorporation of sustainable development objectives into the fiscal system; this will be done in the following broad ways:

614. - review of the tax base, abolishing existing preferential fiscal regimes for products and production processes which pollute, introducing a (supplementary) tax on patterns of production or consumption which are undesirable for social or ecological reasons, and/or introducing preferential regimes for desirable ones. For instance, the Government intends to encourage, by fiscal means, the use of low-sulphur fuels;

615. - shifting the tax base: by reducing taxes on employment and increasing those on the use of natural resources. This alteration to the tax structure should also contribute to the fulfilment of sustainable development targets agreed at international level.

616. This incorporation of sustainable development objectives within the fiscal system raises a number of considerations which result in certain attendant conditions, however:

617. - considerations of an economic or social order. In terms of social policy, the Government considers it necessary to take account of the effects of environmental taxes on low income categories and to design incentive and compensation measures. These adjustments will be such as to fit within the framework of the policy, presented above, of preventing and combating poverty and social exclusion (see Part 2 - chapter on Combating poverty). Because of the open character of the Belgian economy, such adjustments may also prove necessary for firms which use large quantities of heavily taxed products and which are exposed to international competition. The Government also considers it necessary, when introducing these new taxes, to fix and adjust their rates by reference, inter alia, to the chances that these reforms can be carried out within the framework of the European Union, or in step with neighbouring countries. It will make use of the Belgian presidency of the European Union to ensure that practical proposals for this appear on the European agenda;

618. - considerations pertaining to the stability of public revenues. Eco-taxation can result in changes of behaviour, and these will immediately involve a narrowing of the tax base and hence raise questions concerning the stability of public revenues. Given that budget discipline must be maintained for the furtherance of a sounder level of the national debt (and its servicing burden), there is a constraint which must apply in this case. For this reason the Government will ensure, as part of the "green reform" of the fiscal system, that a balance is achieved between environmental fund-raising taxes and environmental taxes aimed at changing behaviour. Environmental fund-raising taxes may be charged on products with a low price-elasticity of demand, or where a relatively low tax rate is combined with a very wide tax base. They may also be used to reduce taxes in other areas. Taxes aimed at regulating behaviour, on the other hand, whose proceeds decrease the more effective they are, may be used to finance temporary projects under the same policy rubric (awareness campaigns, temporary support as a supplementary measure). It is important in any case to ensure constant compliance with the standards of expenditure control implicit in the framework of the Stability Programme for 2000-2003 that is one of Belgium's undertakings to Europe;

619. - considerations pertaining to the fitting together of Federal and Regional environmental taxation. Within the framework of their environmental responsibilities, the Regions have introduced various environmental taxes. This does not prevent the Federal government also



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making use of its wide powers of taxation to pursue sustainable development objectives; but it does mean that complementarity between Federal and Regional measures must be ensured.

620. These are significant constraints; but they will not be allowed to undermine the initial objective, nor the efficiency, of environmental taxation. It is therefore necessary to develop a dynamic vision (eco-taxation is also an opportunity for modernising the industrial fabric, and its implementation may allow measures to be introduced in a progressive way, at a pace which can be forecast with clarity) and an interdepartmental approach (sometimes it is preferable to provide for social adjustments outside the tax system, by a concomitant social policy: for instance, by means of a minimum guaranteed consumption of electricity and gas).

621. An interdepartmental working group will be set up, chaired by the Ministry of Finance and with a representative of the Secretary of State for Energy and Sustainable Development as vice-Chair, with the task of preparing, in stages, an overall report on the "green reform" of taxation. This group will first of all draw up a full inventory of all the exemptions and reductions which exist within the fiscal system and militate against sustainable development. It will formulate proposals for amending this situation. These proposals will be submitted for government decision and will then be worked on by the Minister of Finance. Given that the general reform of taxation announced in the government's declaration must also contribute to the realisation of sustainable development objectives, the Working Group's proposals will be one element in the preparation of this reform, though it must not slow down the timetable for reform of personal taxation.

622. The Working Group will then turn to the preparation of other proposals concerning "green" tax reform, in compliance with the above objectives and conditions. It will base this work on existing studies, foreign experience and plans for reform, and representations from social groups. In the first instance, the Working Group will examine the fiscal proposals set

out in other parts of this Plan : (i) the introduction of an energy/CO₂ tax, including a tax on aviation fuel ; (ii) a shift in car taxation from ownership to use; (iii) a differentiation of VAT depending on the environmental harmfulness of certain products. The Working Group will report back to the government on this by 1 July 2001. Upon the government's approval, the proposals will be worked on by the Minister of Finance. The Working Group will then study the following problems to see whether and how taxation could be organised for the realisation of sustainable development objectives: (i) a general flexibility in price policy for goods of first necessity such as water and energy, with a view to their more rational use; (ii) encouragement of ethical investment funds; (iii) turning eco-taxes into an instrument for an integrated product policy; (iv) the design of forms of international taxation, such as the Tobin tax on speculative capital flows, depending on the result of current work in the Belgian Senate. The report of the Working Group on this second set of problems will be submitted to the government before 31 December 2001. After the government's approval, the drafts will continue to be worked on by the Minister of Finance.

623. In furtherance of this project, it is also fitting to examine the practical effects of this reform for the developing countries. These sometimes depend for their export income on the sale of a limited number of products which, within the framework of the reforms referred to above, could be in line for heavier taxation. This would diminish export earnings for these countries; any negative effects must be compensated for by a policy of support for international cooperation.

3.2.3. Implementation of the Plan

624. The primary responsibilities are those of the Ministry of Finance. Nevertheless, this Ministry must be able to count on receiving proposals from other departments, which should belong on an equal footing to the above-mentioned interdepartmental Working Group. The final responsibility for drawing up technical proposals rests with the Ministry of Finance.

4. Information for decision-making

625. *In sustainable development, everyone is a user and provider of information considered in the broad sense. That includes data, information, appropriately packaged experience and knowledge. The need for information arises at all levels, from that of senior decision-makers at the national and international levels to the grass-roots and individual levels. (Agenda 21; 40.1).* Basing decisions on reliable information requires:

626. - improved access to information and, in particular, care that information be useful to the various groups who need it;

627. - bridging the information gap between the information needed and the information available.

4.1. Accounting for and indicators of sustainable development

4.1.1. Present situation

628. The role of national accounting is to keep a rigorous tally of all operations carried out each year. Its object is to observe and forecast the various components of national development, and to be able to evaluate the policies being carried out. Traditionally, national financial accounting only takes into consideration certain values, certain actors and certain fields. In the first place, it only incorporates information expressed in monetary terms, to the exclusion of other quantitative and qualitative data that might better account for the positive or negative externalities created by certain economic activities. A considerable amount of research has been undertaken in Belgium on incorporating atmospheric emissions and environmental expenditure in national accounts. Nevertheless, Belgium does not yet possess a system which allows regular publication of all the "satellite accounts", social and environmental, that incorporate the externalities connected with our pattern of development. Secondly, national financial accounting is limited to those actors whose economic activities are a matter of record (firms, households, public authorities and the rest of the world). Efforts have been made to tackle this gap in recent years, for instance by taking the non-profit-making sector more fully into account. These efforts have not, however, resulted in a full picture of the operations and effects of all economic agents.

629. As part of the development of national financial accounting, much effort has been devoted to the organised and structured gathering of supplementary economic information, while the collection of environmental and, to a lesser extent, of social information has continued to show more gaps and a less organised structure. As a result there is at present a deficit in the publication of social and environmental information and their links to economic information. This deficit handicaps decision-making on these matters, although they are every bit as important from the point of view of sustainable development. The other parts of this Plan bear witness to this when they put forward indicators which ought to be regularly monitored, and of course when they point to areas for which indicators still need to be developed.

4.1.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

630. In accordance with the undertakings in Agenda 21⁷² to improve information for decision-

⁷² See in particular Chapter 40 (information for decision-making), Chapter 8 (integration of the decision-making process for environmental and development matters) and Chapter 3 (combating poverty).

making, the Government has determined two levels of strategic objective:

631. - at the level of national financial accounting: firstly, taking into account an initial set of positive and negative externalities not currently dealt with in national accounting: by 2002 an overall report on the feasibility of dealing with these in national accounting is to be produced. Next, a Plan for 2003-2005 will be drawn up, on the basis of this report and these tests, which will enable calculation of GNP to be revised and a prototype system of satellite social and environmental accounts dealing with these externalities to be available by 2005. These accounts will be published regularly;

632. - in the matter of the creation and use of indicators of sustainable development: on the one hand, gathering reliable data and designing sustainable development indicators and, on the other, inducing administrations to work more systematically with a set of indicators of sustainable development which afford reliable information on the subjects dealt with and to observe the economic, social and environmental effects of the policies undertaken. These indicators would be reproduced in the annual general policy papers issued by Ministers and Secretaries of State, and also in future Federal Reports on Sustainable Development and CIDD Annual Reports. As with the first Federal Report on Sustainable Development, these indicators will be published in an accessible form.

b. Policies and measures

633. In order to attain these objectives, the following actions will have to be carried out between now and 2003:

634. - support to, and coordination and exploitation of, research aimed at identifying and quantifying the positive and negative externalities not currently accommodated in the national accounts, and development of social and environmental satellite accounts concerning these externalities; a specific budget will be allocated to the regular implementation of green accounting, in continuation of the pilot projects financed by Eurostat on the subject. Once the partial results have been validated scientifically, they will be published;

635. - dynamic follow-up of the activities proliferating at international (United Nations), OECD and European levels concerning the development of social and environmental satellite accounts, indicators for sustainable development and aggregate sustainable development indicators. These are, inter alia:

636. - at the United Nations, trials of the list of indicators presented by the Commission on Sustainable Development. Belgium is committed to continue testing this list of indicators and will continue to contribute to this exercise;

637. - in the European Union, work on green national financial accounting (NAMEA: National Accounting Matrix including Environmental Accounts, and SERIEE: European System for the Gathering of Economic Information on the Environment), on the sector indicators of sustainable development (transport-environment, agriculture-environment, manufacturing-environment, tourism-environment, energy-environment) as well as work on "headline indicators";

638. - at the OECD, various research efforts on sustainable development indicators (indicators of sustainable consumption, sector indicators, green accounting, social indicators, etc.);

639. - on the question of sustainable development indicators, the creation of joint consultation fora for public authorities, researchers and the concerned public, and improvement of accessibility of data and indicators, not least via the Metadata Bank developed by the Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (OSTC);

640. - designating, as required, at least one civil servant per department or administration to act as focal point for indicators of sustainable development, and allocation of the financial means necessary for this. The task of this civil servant(s) will be to encourage the production and follow-up of the relevant indicators for monitoring of the department's internal and external sustainable development activities. These indicators will be reproduced in the annual general policy papers. These civil servants will also be charged with monitoring the indicators put forward in the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development and, where necessary, setting up mechanisms to collect the data used to develop these indicators. This work will be supported by scientific research programmes appropriate to the needs of decision-making (for instance, to define a "macro-socioeconomic" policy instrument that could monitor the impact of measures on poverty); it will be carried on under conditions that ensure transparency;

641. - integration of sustainable development issues in national surveys collecting information on society (e.g., survey of company structure, the household budget survey carried out by the National Statistical Institute, health survey carried out by the Louis Pasteur National Public Health Institute, etc.). The Government will develop data-collection tools that systematically integrate information relating to sustainable development, while making sure that efforts for administrative simplification are not compromised and avoiding excessive numbers of sustainable development indicators.

c. Implementation of the Plan

642. This work on indicators for sustainable development will have to be coordinated within the CIDD. For this purpose a subsidiary working group will be set up in which the departments responsible for the subject at both Federal and Regional level will be encouraged to cooperate..

4.2. Evaluation of the impact of decisions on sustainable development (sustainable development impact assessment - SDIA) with a view to decision-making

4.2.1. Present situation

643. SDIA is a method whereby the administration can study the likely effects (social, economic, ecological) of a proposed policy before taking a final decision, and if necessary consider alternative proposals. The point of such an evaluation is to determine whether a draft policy or intention furthers the policy of sustainable development. The advantage of this method is that decisions may be taken on the basis of organised information on environmental, as well as social and economic aspects (see also the need for a "macro-socioeconomic" instrument, mentioned in part 2, "Combating poverty and social exclusion"). SDIA is not used for checking whether a set objective has in fact been attained. SDIA may be applied to either all or some draft policies and intentions contained in the annual general policy papers, other policy papers and the plans and programmes of the government and regulations. SDIA should be conducted as part of an initial launch stage and at a fairly high political level; for instance, for use in the annual general policy papers and other policy papers.

644. This instrument occurs within the framework of a strategy for sustainable development (Agenda 21) and aims to improve decision-making criteria. Preliminary assessment should include recognition of scientific uncertainties and permit appropriate application of the precautionary principle. A better understanding of the effects of policy measures makes it possible more precisely to describe priorities and alternatives. Discussions within society then have a more solid foundation, and the administration responsible is strengthened. The prior analysis of effects allows a realistic evaluation of policy choices and reduces the number of features that need to be adjusted afterwards. A more highly developed instrument can even



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The government will develop instruments for collecting data

consider effects at international level in the preparatory stages of decision-making.

645. The Amsterdam Treaty ascribed greater importance to sustainable development by including the phrase "sustainable development" alongside protection of the environment and economic and social progress, in Article 2 of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

646. Article 6 of this Treaty provides that the requirements of environmental protection must be integrated into European policy. At the Luxembourg Summit of December 1997, the European Commission was given the task of developing a strategy for integrating this environmental element into EU policy. At the next Council, this integration was extended to sustainable development. SDIA is one of the instruments which make such integration practicable. At present, the European Union is working on a directive on strategic assessment of the impact of programmes and plans on the environment. When working out the SDIA method, it will be useful to take account of these developments at European level. In any case, SDIA will be taking its place within a wider framework, since it covers all three components of sustainable development.

647. Sustainable development is a political project explicitly mentioned in the Government's Declaration of 14 July 1999. The Government thereby expressed its intention to keep sustainable development in mind in all that it proposes. The Declaration of Federal Policy proclaimed by the Prime Minister during the opening of the 1999-2000 parliamentary session confirms this.

648. It is necessary to have a methodology for bringing together the various components of sustainable development. For this reason the Government proposes to make SDIA into an instrument for evaluating how far policy measures are taking account of sustainable development. In Belgium and its administration, knowledge and experience in such prior evaluations are limited, and yet these are the evaluations that are needed for developing SDIA methodology. It is therefore appropriate to give a considerable impetus to the country's capabilities in this matter, so as to be able to develop this methodology (see also the chapter on Science policy).

4.2.2. Action Plan

a. Strategic objectives

649. SDIA aims, in essence, to incorporate sustainable development within the decision-making process. Opportunities for cooperation with the Regions and Communities will be examined. In practical terms, the aim is to reach the following objectives by 2003:

650. - establish the SDIA concept in its proper administrative, political and social position;

651. - arrive at a properly worked out method of SDIA and develop the capabilities needed for this;

652. - provide the necessary time and resources for making SDIA operational so that it can really improve the quality of decision-making;

653. - develop a legal status for it in the longer term.

654. Since the proposal to develop SDIA is relatively concrete, a qualitative indicator will be used when examining the degree to which the objectives referred to above have been reached.

b. Policies and measures

655. The Government wishes to develop the capacities necessary for sustainable development and SDIA within its administrations. To do this, it first needs to arrange for internal discussions and training so that those administrations are conversant with sustainable development and prior assessment.

656. The following points, among others, are necessary for drawing up a general method for evaluating the impact of decisions on sustainable development:

657. - a framework of reference;

658. -an occasion for determining certain specific criteria (beyond the general method of application, with its sector-by-sector criteria) and, where necessary, making it clear what qualitative and quantitative criteria are to be defined;

659. - the draft policies and intentions which must be subjected to SDIA;

660. - the stage of the decision-making process at which SDIA will be applied;

661. - those who are to implement it, whether civil servants or external assessors. Their independence must be guaranteed;

662. - SDIA will be in all cases be performed publicly;

663. - organisation of a public debate on SDIA.

664. The method must be tested. One or several departments will play the part of a test department. At the end of the trial period, which will last about one year, the method can be evaluated and if necessary modified.

c. Implementation

665. The CIDD will use a multi-disciplinary working group to bring the method for evaluating the impact of decisions on sustainable development to the point where it can be used. All departments will be associated with SDIA. For training of civil servants, recourse will be had to the Federal Civil Service Training Institute.

PART 4. STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF MAJOR GROUPS

666. The title of this section, taken from Section III of Agenda 21, refers to the objectives, policies and measures to increase participation by civil society in sustainable development. Agenda 21 identifies various headings for such participation and divides society into nine groups: women, children and youth, indigenous people, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local authorities, trade unions, business and industry, science and technology, farmers. These groups are described in Agenda 21 as "major social groups". The definition is used throughout the Plan because it is accepted at national as well as international level in works on sustainable development. These major social groups play an important role in drawing up sustainable development policy. Agenda 21 devotes a section to each of them. The minutes of discussions in the Federal Parliament committee on the sustainable development legislation note that there cannot be too much emphasis on the importance of the role of these societal actors.

667. This list of social groups does not include minorities or marginalised groups. It covers human collectivities which share a particularly acute sensitivity to certain issues at stake in sustainable development which touch them closely. Only one of these groups could be considered a real minority in Belgium: the community of immigrant origin.

668. A sample survey has shown that women, the young and immigrants are not represented as social groups within advisory committees and showed less interest than other groups in the questionnaire they received on sustainable development.⁷³ Starting from this observation, the Government has decided to make it a priority to include these three groups in the present Plan. Though they do not form a specific group nor a homogeneous social, economic, cultural or political group, they are to be found in all sectors of society and at all levels of the population. Their struggle for respect of their basic rights, such as the right to gender equality, concerns all levels of society. And yet their relations with the rest of society in all countries give rise to regrettable social constructs riddled with inequality and discrimination. For this reason all the themes of this Plan are of concern to them.

1. Advisory councils

1.1. Present situation

669. The participation of civil society in decision-making is one of the cornerstones of sustainable development. This participation takes place primarily by means of advisory councils, which formulate opinions, either on their own initiative or at the Government's request, on major policy documents or draft legislation. Consultative opinions are a mandatory element of the decision-making procedure. It is therefore vital that advisory councils represent the wishes of the various actors on the one hand and the needs of sustainable development, on the other hand. Belgium has a long tradition of consultation and joint deliberation in decision-making. In the case of sustainable development policy, it would be as well to make a brief review of the existing advisory councils and to re-examine both their composition and their mandate, in order to be in a position to establish whether they correspond to the needs of sustainable development or not, and in particular, whether a real involvement of the social groups listed in Agenda 21 is possible. We may also ask to what extent their opinions are taken into account, or should be. Is information being disseminated among the various advisory councils? Are their opinions accessible? A considerable number of questions arise. It is necessary that the public authorities further reinforce their capacity to foster participation.

73 op. cit., p. 412

670. Section III of Agenda 21 emphasises the importance of the role of civil society via advisory councils. The Government's 1999 Declaration, in its section on citizen democracy, states *that a democracy must constantly be evaluating and improving its decision-making process and the patterns of communication it offers*. The Prime Minister's Declaration of Federal Policy at the opening of the 1999-2000 parliamentary session states that if nothing is changed, the institutions will not be able to carry out their tasks properly. Under the title *An Ambitious Project*, it goes on to say that the Government will give all citizens greater participation in the process of political decision-making.

1.2. Action Plan

1.2.1. Strategic objectives

671. The ultimate goal of this Action Plan is to create "real" participation by individual citizens and the major social groups and to rationalise and improve, as much as possible, the functioning of the present councils. This will be done by means of advisory councils whose membership, mandate and operating conditions suit a policy of sustainable development.

672. The composition of these advisory councils needs to be scrutinised to see whether it corresponds to the spirit of Agenda 21, given the particular mandate of each advisory council. The increased participation of advisory councils in the joint deliberation process must be studied, including: (i) the extent to which opinions are taken into account, the reasons for adopting them or not; (ii) strengthening departmental capabilities for participation; (iii) the ways in which information is communicated between the administration and the advisory councils: access to the opinions given must be guaranteed for all those interested; (iv) the conditions for membership of the advisory councils: for instance, representativeness or expert status; (v) the operating conditions for the advisory councils must be spelled out, in particular the timetables for issuing their opinions; and (vi) the arrangements for organising cooperation among advisory councils.

1.2.2. Policies and measures

673. During the first plan period (2000-2003), the existing advisory councils, their composition, their mandate⁷⁴ and their operating conditions will be reviewed. Stages 3 to 6 must not be applied simultaneously to all advisory councils. Priorities should be set on the basis of stage 2.

674. stage 1: list Federal advisory councils, their present composition, their mandate and their operating conditions. At this stage it also needs to be stated which advisory councils also have a joint deliberation function.

675. stage 2: gather this information in the form of a working paper by 1 July 2001.

676. stage 3: determine, jointly with the existing advisory councils and civil society, what the future missions and composition of advisory councils should be.

677. stage 4: gather the information collected in the course of stage 3.

678. stage 5: formulate concrete proposals for the existing advisory councils and joint deliberation councils, on the basis of the information collected in the course of stage 3.

679. stage 6: Continue stage 5 in further detail, working out the necessary directives and draft legislation

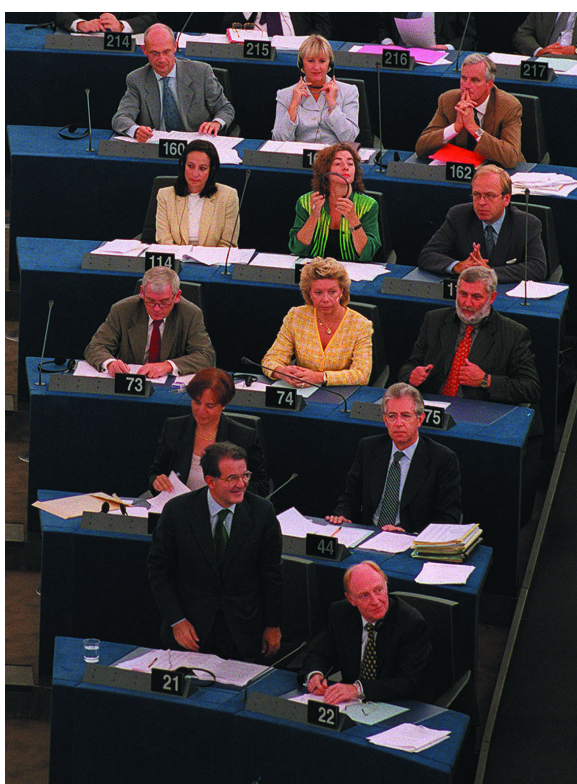
⁷⁴ On the basis of existing studies in this field.

680. During the first Plan period, departmental capabilities concerning participation will be strengthened on the basis of the measures referred to above.

681. So that interested citizens may be effectively involved in the debate on sustainable development, this debate must be properly structured and documented. National and international experiences, among other things in the domain of "technology assessment", will be studied by the OSTC and may in future serve as a basis for such debates.

1.2.3. Implementation of the Plan

682. This is a new initiative, specific to the Sustainable Development Plan. Every department is affected by this Action Plan, and its follow-up is the responsibility of the CIDD.



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Actions for women are aimed at ensuring a role equivalent to that of men

proportion of women occupying them. Of the 21% of Federal ministry employees working on contract, 69% are women and 31% men.

685. - the system of job grading⁷⁵ used at present is relatively old-fashioned, with the result that there are large pay differences between the type of posts mainly filled by women and those mainly filled by men. Job grading thus accounts for around one third of the differences in pay between women and men (this applies only to the private sector).

686. Agenda 21 starts from the principle that active participation of women in political and economic decision-making is of crucial importance for the successful implementation of this plan. In the Final Document of the Fourth World Conference on Women, organised in Beijing

2. Women

2.1. Present situation

683. Women account for more of than half of the population of Belgium. Unfortunately, now at the beginning of the 21st century, this fact does not always find full recognition in political and economic life. About 24% of the representatives elected at the polls on 13 June 1999 are women, and 16.7% of members of the Federal Government. By contrast, we know that women are more often in the grip of poverty and unemployment than men. In 1998, the unemployment rate for women was 11.4%, against 7.3% for men. More women work part time or have less security of employment. Equality of opportunity is therefore not yet a reality, as the following instances show:

684. - analysis of the indicators and targets (figures for June 1997) for Federal Ministries reveals a less than proportionate representation of women within the Federal administration: in general, men and women occupy different positions, and the higher the level and rank of posts the lower the

⁷⁵ Job grading is the result of a job evaluation used as a basis to account for the remuneration awarded. The tool is used to rank the various functions within an organisation and divide them into different classes.

by the United Nations in 1995, governments undertook to take women into consideration equally with men in their policies and in all of their programmes. Moreover, they declared their readiness to uphold the equality of women's rights, opportunities, responsibilities and participation with those of men in all national bodies and in the national political decision-making process.

687. The Treaty establishing the European Community contains commitments to promoting equality between men and women (Article 2) and aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women (Article 3, para.2). It commends incorporation of the principle of "mainstreaming" (i.e., the integration of a "gender" dimension⁷⁶ in the preparation, drafting and implementation of legislation and policy).

688. The 1999 Government Declaration also proclaims equality of opportunity between women and men as an aim, primarily in the labour market and on electoral candidate lists.

2.2. Action Plan

2.2.1. Strategic objectives

689. The ultimate objective of actions in favour of women is to allow them to play an equivalent role to that of men, in all the areas of society and in both private and public life.

690. The objectives for the period of the Plan are the following:

691. - "mainstreaming" in all Federal policy areas, i.e., the integration of equal opportunities policy and of the gender dimension;

692. - Parliament has been invited to study the possibility of granting legal status to organisations whose main object is the upholding of women's rights and interest;

693. - proportionate representation within Federal departments: within the framework of the Copernic reform, ensuring a more balanced representation within the Federal administration. This balance must, inter alia, enable the obligations fixed by the Act of 20 July 1990 concerning composition of consultative (advisory) bodies to be fulfilled at last.

694. - review of job grading: by the end of the period of the Plan, this grading must be reviewed in a certain number of sectors and the necessary measures taken for implementing new arrangements;

695. - improving the status of the spouse-cum-business partner, for instance, on a farm or in business;

696. - a status for confidential advisors in matters of sexual harassment at the workplace⁷⁷ with sufficient protection so they may carry out this function in complete independence;

697. - the pursuit of investigations into domestic violence. The situation of the victims must be improved;

698. - a study of the relationship between family and work situations. There must be a better division of time in terms of hours devoted to paid work, to the family and to leisure activities.

⁷⁶ Gender (or social relations of the sexes): a concept referring to the social differences between men and women which are acquired, liable to change over time, and can vary widely both within and across different cultures (European Commission (1998). 100 words for equality. A glossary of terms for equal opportunities between men and women. EC Publications Offices. p. 31).

⁷⁷ Sexual harassment at the workplace and status of confidants: Royal Decree of 18 September 1992 for protection of workers from sexual harassment at the workplace established a function of confidential advisor. The status of such persons must be established in such a way that they can carry out their function as entrusted to them by law...

Men should be able to take on more household tasks;

699. - a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender and poverty. Further study is needed of the individualization of personal rights concerning social security and taxation;

700. - Parity in political matters.

701. Indicators: the fulfilment of the objectives referred to above must be monitored with the help of indicators revealing:

702. - the representation of women as a social group in Federal advisory and joint deliberation bodies;

703. - the participation of women in political and economic life (percentage of women among managers and directors, percentage of women in the Government, in Ministerial Cabinets as Head or Deputy Head of Cabinet and as advisers);

704. -the representation of women in Federal Ministries (ratio of women to men at the various levels of the administration, ratio of women to men on fixed-term or indefinite-term contracts, or with the status of temporary civil servant);

705. - the job grading review (number of sectors where a new classification is applied);

706. -the visibility of women in statistics (percentage of all published statistics, by policy area, which are broken down by gender);

707. - the link between gender and poverty (see Part 2 - chapter on Poverty);

708. - sexual harassment (number of cases reported to confidential advisors).

Policies and measures

709. "Mainstreaming": New instruments will be created or existing ones developed so as to incorporate equal opportunities policy in each Federal department, in the political decision-making process and in advisory councils and translate this policy into practical results. Capacities will be strengthened through training in gender problems as a matter of priority for politicians and top civil servants, who must be convinced of the benefits of these instruments if they are to encourage their civil servants accordingly. Investment in the publication of statistics broken down by gender is worthwhile in terms of its support to equal opportunities policy, as is the development of instruments for editing texts in gender-neutral language: this applies as much to internal texts and draft legislation as to policy documents.

710. As regards the granting of legal status to organisations whose main object is upholding women's rights, arrangements for the creation of this legal status need to be studied.

711. Proportionate representation within the Federal administration: the Government is requesting research into the development of instruments and methods to facilitate the appointment and promotion of women within the civil service. Legislation and recruitment procedures will be inspected for neutrality as to gender (among other things, in terms of the choice of tests). There needs to be an improvement in the organisational position of the "civil servant in charge of affirmative action" and proposals for alterations that would improve gender neutrality in a general way.

712. Review of job grading: among other measures, there needs to be provision of sufficient logistical support in terms of personnel and corresponding financial benefits for those sectors taking part in this exercise. This assumes that the negotiations needed to neutralise opposition from various actors will be initiated.

713. The status of spouse-cum-business partner: such a status should be established during

the period of the Plan. Opinion N° 28 of 10 December 1999 of the Gender Equality Council can be used as a basis for this.

714. Sexual harassment at the workplace: the status problems confronted by confidential advisors will be studied, and proposals drawn up and worked out to ensure their independence in the exercise of their functions.

715. Domestic violence: research in this field must be continued. During the period of the Plan, the National Forum for a policy in favour of victims will work out a plan, in collaboration with the appropriate Federal, Community and Regional offices, within the framework of the cooperation agreements for victim support.

716. Work and family: measures concerning improved arrangements for working time must be considered, not least a harmonisation of the various existing measures concerning part-time work.

717. Political parity: in addition to drawing up legislation aimed at parity, the Government will conduct a public awareness campaign at election times. This campaign might be a matter for joint organisation with the Regions, Communities and local authorities.

2.2.3. Implementation of the Plan

718. The Action Plan proposed will make it possible first to draw up and then to promote the guidelines on gender equality of opportunity in the Belgian Action Plan on Employment 1999 that was established within the framework of the European guidelines for employment. It is part of the work undertaken by the Ministry of Employment and Labour in the Directorate of Equal Opportunity. "Mainstreaming", proportionate representation within Federal administrations and the status of confidential advisors are all concepts which necessarily involve the entire administration. The success of this Action Plan will largely depend on the attitude of the personnel services in each administration, the Civil Service Ministry and the Federal Administration Recruitment Bureau (SELOR).

3. Young people and children

3.1. Present situation

719. Young people and children are very closely associated with the project of a society of sustainable development, since this is essentially a vision of the future. Children and the young represent almost 30% of the world population (Agenda 21; 25.1). The general aim is thus a "responsible, active, critical and mutually supportive citizenry", not in some abstract sense but as applied to the issues involved in bringing about patterns of sustainable development. Children and the young must be treated as full citizens. Parents, organisations, social assistance agencies and organisations concerned with the welfare of children and the young must also be considered members of the dialogue.

720. These development and environmental issues concern the young particularly:

721. - the young are creative and have a power of imagination as yet unharnessed.

722. - the best way of achieving the maturity necessary for the sustainable practice of citizenship which is mindful of responsibilities and respects the environment is to become a full participant in social discussions;

723. - if the young are not regarded as participants, they rightly reject the society which treats them this way and are at the same time rejected by that society.

724. In the case of children:

725. - in many developing countries, children make up nearly half the population. Most global sustainable development problems produce their most dire effects in these countries, but the risks of effects that may be expected in a few decades extend to the entire planet: children are therefore seriously affected by the problems of development in general and sustainable development in particular (Agenda 21; 25.12);

726. - in both the developing and developed countries, children are the part of the population most vulnerable to environmental degradation (Agenda 21; 25.12);

727. - children are generally enthusiastic champions of the environment and justice (cf.: "A plea to the leaders of the planet" addressed by them to the Rio Conference).

728. Agenda 21 devoted a chapter to children and young people and their place in the process of achieving sustainable development. Agenda 21 was preceded, in 1990, by the World Summit for Children and followed by specific conferences on children, sexual exploitation and child labour. Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be ensured. Monitoring will be carried out by the National Commission for Children's Rights, in collaboration with government agencies, NGOs and experts.

729. The Government's Declaration of 1999 contains a proposal to introduce a "first jobs" scheme for the young.

3.2. Action Plan

3.2.1. Strategic objectives

730. The objectives aim to form an integrated policy for children and young people which fits within the framework of sustainable development policy and treats children and the young as partners.

731. The actions for the first period of the Plan have the following objectives:

732. - youth employment : by the end of the period of the Plan, 50% of the young should have a proper job within six months of leaving school, as specified in the Belgian Action Plan for Employment and in the legislation on agreements for first jobs for the young (Act of 24 December 1999 for the promotion of employment);

733. - participation of the young in societal discussions on the national and international aspects of sustainable development;

734. - protection of children and incorporation of their needs in policies (see also, for domestic violence: part 4 - chapter on Women; for road safety: part 2 - chapter on Transport)..

735. Indicators: a number of indicators will have to be monitored in order to evaluate the degree of integration, participation and protection of children and the young, in the perspective of sustainable development. The most important are: the welfare and quality of life of young people and children, the youth rate of employment, the level of training, the percentage of suicides among children and the young, broken down by age group, as well as other indicators to be constructed on the standard of living of young households compared with other age groups and the health problems of children and the young in connection with the quality of the environment. These indicators must make it possible to take account of differences in the situation of girls and boys. It is also desirable to develop an indicator showing the degree of involvement of children and the young in politics.

3.2.2. Policies and measures

a. Young people

736. Youth employment: the Federal government will conduct an active policy to implement the provisions on employment in the Treaty establishing the European Community and will work out and apply an annual Action Plan for employment as called for by the European guidelines on youth employment. Next, it will apply the Act of 24 December 1999 for the promotion of employment so that this may bear fruit by the end of the period covered by the plan. For this, the Federal authorities will conduct the necessary negotiations with the Regions. It is important that Federal, Regional and Community administrations make a priority of involving the young within the framework of sustainable development projects, for instance, those on the following problem areas: policy for inner cities, development cooperation, child care, help for the aged, security and combating violence and bullying at school. Employment schemes must be designed in the environmental and sustainable development fields, in collaboration with local initiatives on employment, CPAS, etc.

737. Participation in society's discussions on sustainable development: the Government will take and support various initiatives with a view to stimulating the debate on sustainable development among the young. The objective must be for the greatest possible number of young people to be heard, involved and directly consulted. It is important that the young be heard and be given opportunities to participate. The Federal Government: (i) will explicitly request the Youth Councils in the three Communities to devote one working meeting to the Federal Sustainable Development Report and the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development and to formulate an opinion; (ii) will actively urge the Communities to incorporate sustainable development within the secondary school curriculum. Relevant themes to do with society and the world will be discussed; (iii) will widely consult young people about sustainable development and take their questions and reflections seriously into account; (iv) will encourage and support the young to take on responsibilities in organisations and associations (sports clubs, youth movements, voluntary work, etc.) in order to foster their integration and participation in society.

738. Participation in international meetings on sustainable development: as stated in Agenda 21 (Agenda 21 ; 25.9h), it is important that youth representatives be included in Belgian delegations to international meetings on sustainable development and that these young people can take part in such work with a firm background of knowledge. For this reason, Ministers and Secretaries of State who chair and vice-chair the CIDD will jointly finance the participation of six young people from the three Communities - two from each - in the negotiations designed to draw up, in 2002, a review of the first 10 years of sustainable development. These young people should also be asked to formulate, in collaboration with their respective Councils, a synthesis of the views expressed on the theme of sustainable development by international youth forums since the Rio Conference and to widely circulate this synthesis among the organisations belonging to the Councils.

739. Educational activities have been organised for young people in the three Communities on the theme of Development Cooperation. At present there are 120 fact files available to associations catering for young people aged 16 to 18. This documentation covers four themes: the financial bubble (and alternatives for social economy and mutual aid schemes and cooperatives), fair trade (where does the product come from?), healthy nutrition (making conscious choices about what to eat), and migration and development. Following Agenda 21 (Agenda 21 ; 25, 9f), the plan must support and even strengthen such initiatives, firstly by adding a component with information devoted to Federal actions for sustainable development and, secondly, by inviting young people to participate in public inquiries on this matter.

b. Children

740. The Children's Councils of local authorities are essential for sustaining and enriching a similar dialogue. These are most often composed of children in years 5 and 6 of primary school (i.e., between 10 and 12 years old) and are not restricted to themes concerning local authority responsibilities. They should be established in all the local authorities and put in touch with all the advisory councils. The young must have adequate teaching material available to them. Local authority Children's Councils should be convened more regularly and their functioning must be improved. The Government will forward the combined views set down by young people within the framework of the first 10-year review of sustainable development to these Councils during 2003, at meetings organised to gather the policy proposals to be addressed in the second Federal Plan for Sustainable Development. Research will be another channel through which young people may participate.

741. Protection of Children's Rights and their incorporation in government policies: the Government wishes to give the annual Day of the Child (20 November) a higher profile. In 2000, this Day will be the subject of particular attention to mark the fact that the Convention on Children's Rights will have been in force for 10 years and that Belgium signed it in 1990. This day would be an ideal occasion not only to review commitments undertaken but also to develop an active and creative Children's Rights policy. It might also favour a commitment to launching a dialogue between children and the world of politics. Children's Day should be accompanied by a fuller and more permanent initiative. There are grounds for examining whether it would be advantageous to appoint a Federal Commissioner for Children's Rights.

742. The Government wishes to incorporate children's needs into its policies: this will be done by working out a method of assessing the impact of decisions on children. This assessment implies that in taking a decision, an analysis of its effects on the overall situation of children's lives should be carried out.

3.2.3. Implementation of the Plan

743. The proposed Action Plan for youth employment is part of the 1999 Belgian National Action Plan for Employment, established in compliance with European guidelines on the subject, the Government's 1999 Declaration and the Government's decision on the legislation to introduce a 'first job' agreement for young people. The other measures come within the framework of cooperation with the Regions and Communities, or within the framework of action by the members of the Government who chair and vice-chair the CIDD.

4. Foreigners and refugees

4.1. Present situation

744. A multicultural society may be called tolerant if the differences it contains are regarded as enriching. Integration of foreigners in Belgium is one of the priorities of a policy of sustainable development. The traffic in human beings, refugees and the right of asylum, an asylum policy that is humane and realistic, and the struggle against racism are subjects in this problem area that are of immediate importance.

745. - The traffic in human beings: this consists of aiding or conniving at the entry to or staying in Belgium of an alien, with the use of fraudulent manoeuvres, violence, threats or any form of constraint or abuse of the alien's particularly vulnerable situation due to irregular or precarious administrative status, or pregnancy or illness, physical or mental. Between 1996 and 1998, 734 victims of traffic in human beings were helped by specialised reception centres, though this figure does not represent the total number of victims. More than half the

victims received at these centres are aged under 25 years. More than 3 in 5 - mainly women - are active in prostitution and have illegal immigrant status⁷⁸. Traffic in human beings constitutes a violation of Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is punished as a crime in Belgium.

746. - Refugees - asylum policy: persons have the right to asylum if they fulfil the following conditions: they have reason to fear persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinions; they are not in the country of which they are nationals, and are unable or, because of this fear, unwilling to claim that country's protection, or they have no nationality and are outside their normal country of residence and are unable or, because of this fear, unwilling to return there. In Belgium, the number of applications for asylum has grown exponentially since 1997, mainly because of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. In 1997, 11,804 applications were recorded by the General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons; in 1998, the figure rose to 22,024 and in 1999 to 35,778. The right of asylum is guaranteed by the Convention on the Status of Refugees, which Belgium has signed.

747. - The struggle against racism: racism is one particular form of discrimination. By "discrimination" is meant every distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference which has or can have the effect of nullifying, compromising or restricting the recognition, the enjoyment or the exercise, in conditions of equality, of the human rights or fundamental liberties in the political, economic, social or cultural domains or in any other domain of social life. The Equal Opportunities and Anti-racism Centre received 843 complaints in 1996, 1,100 in 1997 and 922 in 1998. In 1998, one complaint in five concerned the public services and one complaint in ten had to do with discrimination in the labour market. The Centre estimates that there is a real issue of racism in one complaint in every five. Racism constitutes a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on Children's Rights and is punished as a crime in Belgium.

748. Problems in these policy areas have their origins in international migrations, demographic developments, economic (under-)development and poor or inadequate management of natural resources. These problems also constantly interact with such phenomena. As regards the last three points, the developed countries bear some responsibility. These problems show how international problems are inter-related, as well as the opportunities for Belgium to formulate policies to respond to their challenges.

4.2. Action Plan

4.2.1. Strategic objectives

749. The objective of the international community is to eradicate racism and traffic in human beings. The right to demand asylum must be respected and full application of the Convention on the Status of Refugees guaranteed. For this reason, the Government will take initiatives to elaborate a European policy on the subject, following the conclusions of the European summit at Tampere.

750. For the first period of the Plan, it has set the following objectives:

751. - a 50% decrease in the number of cases of traffic in human beings, as a first, intermediate objective, the ultimate goal still being its total eradication;

752. -the recognition of the status of protected person in cases where Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights is not being respected;

⁷⁸ Equal Opportunities and Anti-racism Centre [Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme] Annual Report 1998.

753. - a realistic and humane asylum policy;

754. - combating racism: curbing racism and a decrease in the number of complaints on grounds of racism.

4.2.2. Policies and measures

755. The Government wishes the action programme devoted to these three themes to be monitored by a system of indicators, within a Working Group composed of experts from the services concerned. This Working Group will have the task of selecting relevant indicators and developing a performance indicator table that will enable those with political responsibility to monitor the effects of policies and make changes where necessary.

756. In this way it will be possible to verify to what extent strategic objectives are being achieved. Changes in racism can be followed by the following elements: number of complaints of racism received by the Equal Opportunities and Anti-racism Centre and the number of cases resulting in prosecution for racism, as well as the number of convictions.

757. On this matter, particular attention will be paid to consultation with all target groups involved in this policy.

758. Traffic in human beings: the Government, the European Union and the international community must make full use of all available means for combating the traffic in human beings. For this purpose, there also needs to be a policy to attack the profits from this traffic. The Federal government agreement of 1999 stipulates that the recommendations of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into traffic in human beings (1994) which have not yet been implemented will be. The Federal Government will work in close collaboration with the Equal Opportunities and Anti-racism Centre as well as organisations working on behalf of the victims of the traffic in human beings. The Federal Government will take measures to improve



Photoreads : Bert Van den Brouckie

The government will take initiatives for the struggle against racism

the situation in the victims' home countries, develop programmes to integrate those who will be remaining in Belgium and an information campaign about the traffic in human beings, enhance the resources of the prosecuting authorities and police services so as to improve action against clandestine immigration routes, step up surveillance and controls on communication routes used for such traffic, in collaboration with the authorities of neighbouring countries, and conclude cooperation agreements with the transit or home countries of clandestine immigrants, while respecting the principle of not turning back refugees, in compliance with Article 33 of the Geneva Convention;

759. Refugees - asylum policy : the whole of the Government's intentions, as set out in the 1999 government agreement, will be put into practice within a humane and integrated asylum policy. The Federal government agreement provides for a specific status for persons displaced as a result of war and the regularisation of illegal immigrants under a set procedure, provided certain conditions are fulfilled. It also provides for improvements in procedures for asylum and the granting of an interest-free loan to facilitate the reinsertion of refugees returning to their home country after a stay in Belgium, as well as the best possible use of the micro-credit system. Measures will be taken, in collaboration with the appropriate services, to improve the reception and integration of migrants and to put forward alternatives to closed centres in the case of minors.

760. The Government will take measures so that more people may benefit from the status of protected person, recognised in cases where Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights has not been respected. In this framework, it will give particular attention to violations of specific rights in the matter of sexual practices.

761. In addition, the Government wishes to examine whether a status of temporary protection could be granted to people and groups who have been displaced as a result of war.

762. Particular attention will moreover be paid to women victims of sexual violence. The Federal Government will take a series of measures for this (see also the chapter on Women, part 4).

763. Combating racism and intolerance: the Government recognises that it is important for the population to have a positive image of other groups of people and other cultures. For this reason, a set of measures will be carried out in this field. Moreover, as stated in the Federal government agreement, the effectiveness of current legislation against racism and revisionism will be assessed and any necessary changes made. The Minister of Justice will issue a circular to the heads of prosecuting authorities to ensure that the legislation on this subject is effectively applied. Furthermore, the Government is inviting Parliament to apply the Act of 12 February 1999 amending existing legislation on the financing and control of political parties. The Council of Ministers approved on 17 March 2000 a draft law against discrimination in general, which provides penalties for any discrimination on the basis of age, gender, sexual orientation, handicap or illness. Racism will constitute an aggravating circumstance for a series of offences. A code of good conduct is currently being drawn up jointly with the business world. Moreover, particular attention is to be devoted to the problems involved in the policy for reception and integration of foreigners, as proposed in the assessment reports of the Equal Opportunities and Anti-racism Centre.

764. The Government is inviting the Senate to carry out an assessment of the rules for naturalisation, as provided in the government agreement, and to give consideration to the issue of citizenship rights.

4.2.3. Implementation of the Plan

765. Asylum policy has now been revised; legislative initiatives have been taken in this direction, as well as government decisions. Measures against racism and traffic in human beings have come into force.

766. The Federal Government recognises that the problems dealt with in this theme are connected with problems of social exclusion and poverty and are encountered by all the public services. Consequently all the public services have responsibilities, in their domain, to combat racism, discrimination and traffic in human beings, as well as to put into practice a humane asylum policy. Those mainly responsible at Federal level for the implementation of the specific measures in this Action Plan are the following: the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Public Health and the Environment, the Social Integration Department, the coordination unit for refugee reception centres, the Ministry of the Interior, the Aliens Bureau, the General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, lastly, the Ministry of Labour and Employment. The Equal Opportunities and Anti-racism Centre will also be making major contributions in this matter.

PART 5. TEN GUIDELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

767. This document accounts for little over a hundred pages, and the subject matter to be covered is immense. The wide scope afforded to all those involved in the Plan can therefore only be made to work properly if common approaches govern their actions for sustainable development, thus enhancing their coherence and by degrees creating synergies among them. For this reason 10 guidelines oriented towards practical decision-making have been defined, taking as a starting-point the five theoretical principles set out in Chapter 1.1. Like those principles, these broad guidelines concern all the themes targeted by this Plan, as well as all the themes of sustainable development in general. These guidelines are recommendations drawn up by the Federal government on the way in which this Plan, and all the plans which will be drafted in extension of it, should be carried out. Application of these guidelines will be one major contribution to the learning process for coordination of sustainable development policies which is called for by the Act of 5 May 1997 on coordination of federal sustainable development policy. This learning process will take place under the constant supervision provided by various forms of consultation, official expressions of opinion and regular assessments, including those in the biannual Federal Report on Sustainable Development which that same Act requires.

1. Guideline on the political responsibility of Ministers and Secretaries of State in relation to the sustainable development project

768. It is recommended that from 2000 onward, every annual note of general policy from Ministers and Secretaries of State in the Federal Government should contain a section entitled "sustainable development". This section would be wholly devoted to setting out the actions and policies coming within that Department's responsibilities in response to the challenges of sustainable development in the 21st century, at both international and national levels. Choices for Federal domestic policy would thus be seen against the background of the issues recognised in Agenda 21 as relevant for the planet as a whole (and all the economic, social and environmental commitments which affect sustainable development). Foreign policy options will be explicitly related to the commitments undertaken by Belgium in this field.

769. It is recommended that this "sustainable development" section should each year announce at least two new measures to be incorporated within the Plan for Sustainable Development by governmental decision during the year; where necessary an assessment will be made of existing legislation and regulations so as to retain coherence. This section will also assemble the details of international negotiations in which the Minister or Secretary of State has participated during the previous year and which have made significant changes in the direction of sustainable development.

2. Guideline on the responsibilities of Federal Civil Service Departments

770. These departments are responsible for following up the commitments, projects and measures, current and previous, decided on by governments. The Annual Reports on sustainable development policy and on the implementation of the Plan in each department and public body submitted by the members of the Interdepartmental Committee on Sustainable Development must therefore give an account of this follow-up also. So that the departments can carry out this work in a systematic and uninterrupted fashion, a Sustainable Development Unit will be set up in each department. These units, which will as far as possible use existing resources, will see to the implementation of national and international undertakings on sustainable development, both within the department concerned and in the policies it prepares and implements. It will organise the dissemination of information and

awareness of sustainable development issues within the department. Interdepartmental coordination among these units will be fostered, mainly via the Interdepartmental Committee on Sustainable Development. This Committee will, in each of its Annual Reports, summarise the progress made by the various departments in the direction of sustainable development.

3. Guideline on the objectives of sustainable development

771. Some "ultimate" objectives for the 21st century are contained in Agenda 21 and in the international Conventions which deal with sustainable development; for instance the eradication of poverty, the protection of the atmosphere (e.g., requiring stabilisation of the concentration of greenhouse gases) and of the marine environment (e.g., requiring that a level of zero emissions for hazardous substances into the North Sea be reached by 2020), the establishment of sustainable patterns of consumption, etc. With the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of Belgium's Permanent Representations to the EU and the UN, each department will draw up a list of commitments undertaken by Belgium on sustainable development which come within its sphere, noting those promises that Belgium has kept or has not yet kept. The translation of these ultimate objectives into quantified "intermediate" ones, with deadlines of not more than 10 years, will be speeded up so as to reduce as quickly as possible the heavy and unsustainable burdens our present pattern of development is causing. For this, the ultimate objectives will be converted into quantitative objectives for the longer term and then divided into intermediate objectives defined over the short or medium term depending on the type of plan under consideration.

772. This recommendation is addressed in a broad way to the scientific institutions, in the hope that they will develop more systematically multi-disciplinary studies helping to define political objectives based on real opportunities in technological development and social organisation. It is also addressed to the organs of political or consultative deliberation, so that they may work on these objectives and provide them with the support of a sufficient social consensus. Realisation of this Plan requires that the budget for scientific research explicitly take into account its needs concerning the translation of objectives, forecasts, a multi-disciplinary approach, indicators, etc. Federal departments will more systematically integrate proposals concerning the adoption of such objectives in the Annual Reports of members of the Interdepartmental Committee on Sustainable Development.

4. Guideline on future prospects in Belgium

773. This process of collective apprenticeship in sustainable development should improve the sense of direction and the content of decision-making, enabling "intermediate" objectives to be reached (see the preceding paragraph). A good understanding of the present situation, trends and the options open to decision-makers is in fact one indispensable condition for formulating sustainable development policies. For this reason the Government will be inviting Parliament to hold an annual debate on the outlook for sustainable development, during which papers forecasting various aspects of sustainable development in Belgium and at international level will be presented and discussed. The conclusions of these papers will be made public, and this activity will therefore contribute to establishing a decision-making culture which takes better into consideration what developments can be foreseen and which are desirable, both on a national and on an international level.

774. This apprenticeship and these debates will not only provide impetus to the contributions and attentiveness of those in government, but also the members of civil society as a whole (particularly as organised in the major social groups) and of public administrations (which act as an interface between government and people). Representatives of each of these components of society could perhaps be invited by Parliament to attend these debates. The Federal Parliament must be accorded the freedom to arrange this exercise in such a way that

it can examine various issues in a logical order.

5. Guideline on means applied to the fulfilment of sustainable development strategies

775. To decide on a policy of sustainable development is to decide on the budget and logistical means of bringing it about: they are one and the same political undertaking. The adoption of ambitious sustainable development objectives must not be nullified by stinginess in the means devoted to them, or feebleness in the strategic machinery set up for their fulfilment. With practical, effective improvements in matching adequate resources to declared objectives, the Government will be in a position to act in good time to benefit the future and tackle the problems of sustainable development before they become acute.

776. The implementation of sustainable development presupposes more often a reorientation than an increase in taxes, charges and public expenditure. Nevertheless, these two options will be considered when drawing up a general diagram of the distribution of responsibilities and means (including budgetary ones) to be applied. This diagram will make clear who is to do what within the Federal civil service, and when. It will be established within six months of the Government's publication of the Plan. Measures will be taken to develop analytical and evaluative procedures (cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness, calculation of public spending impact and environmental and socio-economic effects, technology assessment...), so that future judgements will be better founded when making decisions as to choices and priorities. These methods take account not only of current direct costs, but also of future benefits, including those which will lighten the burden on budgets, resulting from such measures.

6. Guideline on the incorporation of policies and measures for sustainable development

777. The social, economic and environmental components of development are three aspects of one single entity in the real world. They ought therefore to undergo mutually coherent changes, if the path followed by development results from coherent visions of the future and compatible wills. However, in science and in politics as generally practised, these components are handled in isolation, without knowing of or caring for their links and interactions. The accent in future must be on the links among these components of development and on the need to find a balance when their individual objectives come into short-term conflict. So far as protection of the environment is concerned, the basic principles of the Amsterdam Treaty already provide for integrating these requirements when drawing up and carrying out the policies and actions enshrined therein, in particular in order to promote sustainable development. As an example, we may recall that the latest OECD⁷⁹ report recommended that Belgium should integrate its environmental policy more closely with its transport and agriculture policies, so as to attain a more sustainable development. In other fields, complementary arrangements will have to be made.

778. The implementation of a Sustainable Development Plan thus requires an improvement of the decision-making process in each sector, by breaking down barriers and integrating social, environmental and economic policies, including fiscal measures and the budget (Agenda 21 8.4.c). Agenda 21 is here concerned to make explicit mention of the budgetary and fiscal aspect, because the implementation of sustainable development presupposes a series of changes in these areas (see preceding paragraph). Improvement of the decision-making process also depends on the bodies that have the job of coordination and joint deliberation. These should be given a higher profile in order to help public opinion to understand the importance of their role, and so that horizontal actions may yield optimal

79 OECD (1998). Environmental Performance Reviews-Belgium. Paris: OECD. p.30.

results. Along with the main executive, legislative and judicial institutions, these bodies form the institutional machinery that is essential for ensuring Belgium's sustainable development, while respecting the competences of each member of the Federal structure. They need also to improve their functioning so that there is more vertical integration between levels of government and horizontal integration among components of sustainable development. .

779. This need is visible at all levels of government (the Federal level and the Communities and Regions) where the direction, plans and instruments of individual sectoral policies for the various entities comprising Belgium are operated. Setting up new and adequate structures (for instance, new cooperation agreements) will not achieve this improved functioning unless the need for them can be properly demonstrated, for the essential thing is to concentrate the strength of the public authorities in the existing bodies that are doing work of good quality. It is the same in the case of the working groups which the Plan proposes to establish in various places. The summary diagram called for in paragraph 776 will be specific in spelling out the conditions for participation in these working groups, and their terms of reference.

7. Guideline on a multi-disciplinary approach

780. Sustainable development requires the scientific basis for decisions to be largely broadened. Research ought more frequently to result in properly designed policy instruments that can rapidly be used in practice. Sustainable development in fact requires a strengthening of the scientific capacities, resources and knowledge applied to the formulation of objectives (see the Guideline concerning sustainable development objectives) and placed at the service of sustainable development and its aims, in the form of scientific assessments of current conditions and future prospects for the Planet Earth (Agenda 21; 35.3). These scientific capacities and resources that need strengthening are as much a matter of the humanities (philosophy, linguistics, ethnology, human ecology, history, sociology, political economy, psychology, economics, law, etc.) whose study object is mankind in its various aspects, as of the other sciences (biology, geology, agronomy, physics, chemistry, statistics, mathematics...). The one group is also no less indispensable than the other in discovering more realistic paths towards sustainable development.

781. For this reason, cooperation between institutions and scientists of different backgrounds in training, experience and origins (including those of developed and developing countries) will be improved by the promotion of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary initiatives and research programmes financed both by government departments and the budget for scientific research dealing specifically with the needs of the Plan, as defined in paragraph 772. Interdisciplinary research programmes establish scientific links among disciplines. Interdisciplinary programmes are more systematically oriented towards action. They improve the tools and prepare the measures that make it possible to consider various aspects (economic, social, environmental, institutional...) of a problem simultaneously when making the decisions that solve the problem.

782. It is particularly important to measure and highlight, on the one hand, the risks of serious or irreversible damage connected with present social, economic and environmental trends, and, on the other hand, the costs and benefits of the policies enabling these risks to be tackled, including precautionary measures (see paragraphs 773. for forecasting, and 776. for methods of analysis and evaluation). Research in these fields will in future be carried out in a way more closely connected with the everyday issues of social life. Participation in society's debates, including within consultation and joint deliberation structures, is one of the best ways of learning to see the everyday connections and multi-disciplinary complexity of these issues. The Government will concert its action with the Communities so as to uphold the sustainable development project in Belgium by means of systems which promote and make the most of efforts to share scientific knowledge. Both within the scientific community and in the case of public opinion and among decision-makers, this will involve fostering the rigorous

application of pedagogical efforts to the results of scientific research of relevance for political decision-making, so as to encourage researchers to persevere along these lines.

8. Guideline on indicators for sustainable development

783. All the players involved in this Plan should be sure to help in jointly formulating indicators for use in decision-making for sustainable development, so that long-term trends in the variables liable to have a significant impact on the objectives set out above may be more properly evaluated and the foundations laid for decisions which improve the economic, environmental and social standards that determine societal life. It is recognised that indicators can never dispel all uncertainties, whether they relate to statistics or principles. But the long-term effects of development options are frequently better understood if discussions about them can be informed by indicators with a scientific basis which is adequate, even if incomplete. The Government will see to it that during the first year after adoption of this Plan, all Federal departments provide, firstly, a list of the Plan issues (ones relating to their fields of responsibility) pointing out where indicators are available and/or regularly published (indicators to be listed and references given) and those for which indicators are in preparation or are still to be prepared. These indicators are indispensable if the Plan is to be applied and its follow-up organised, in the biannual Federal Reports required by the Act of 5 May 1997 on coordination of Federal sustainable development policy. It will also ensure that scientific underpinning and coordination of these efforts is strengthened across the board, so as to reduce dissipation of efforts in this matter and to have available, before the next plan is drawn up, a first "performance indicator table of coherent indicators" for decision-making on sustainable development.

9. Guideline on new strategic planning

784. It is recommended that Ministers and Secretaries of State in the Federal Government keep enhancing the Framework Plans for Sustainable Development with information (see Guideline on indicators) and new decisions (see Guideline on Ministers' responsibility). These must become effectively incorporated by degrees into the Plan for Sustainable Development which once every four years sets out the strategic priorities and directions, and the time sequence, under which action is to be organised. The Plan, arranged with reference to the Sections and Chapters of Agenda 21, establishes the foundations of future actions with the aid of objectives (quantified so far as possible), policies and measures, detailed timetables, a budget broken down by administrative department, and a sharing of responsibilities. The technique for working out the Plan: "pre-planning, consulting, planning, implementation, monitoring/reporting, pre-planning, consulting etc." implies, thanks to this four-year cycle, better follow-up and greater transparency for the political decision-making process.

785. According to this new approach to the future, the process of making and implementing decisions becomes as important as the decisions themselves. A Plan for Sustainable Development must increase the coherence of decisions for all the sectors concerned and at the same time gain the assent, not only of the Plan's authors, but of those who are called on to play a part in it. Actor involvement, and a greater transparency of the process, are achieved at three levels. 1) The general public is consulted every four years on the basis of the first draft of the Plan, and the result of this consultation is made public. 2) The opinion of the Federal Council on Sustainable Development and other advisory councils, pronouncing not only on the Framework Plan but also on many specific decisions concerning its application, are also published. 3) Lastly, the actors or groups of actors specifically concerned by major application decisions take part in joint consultation, regular or *ad hoc* as the case may be.

786. Far from rejecting the contributions of science and quantification, the sustainable development approach aims on the contrary steadily to improve political decisions based on

a process of continuous learning about conditions of coherence and relevant information. The tools for this control include the Annual Report by members of the Interdepartmental Committee on Sustainable Development on their department's fulfilment of the Plan (see paragraph 770) and the biannual Federal Report (intended to provide regular assessment of the impact of sustainable development policies, both on past events (*ex post*) and on the future (*ex ante*)). Regular publication of these reports has been instituted at the same time as the Plan itself. They are made available to all those with a part to play in this new strategic planning, and they contribute to laying the foundations for subsequent Plans.

10. Guideline on participation and the responsibilities of the various players

787. The defining of sustainable development strategies and the choice of reference indicators for evaluating progress in their implementation must be able to draw on an adequately representative and balanced participation by the major social groups. The public authorities must in fact recognise the need to subject the acceptance of economic, environmental and social hazards and their handling to deliberation at the proper level of social life for the matter in question. The existing advisory councils and representatives of employers and workers must play an important role in this deliberation, as well as other groups affected by the policy. Such a public dialogue engenders support within society for the policies carried out and enriches the policy through confrontation between differing visions of its content and standards. The very antithesis of strategies of secrecy or the politics of the fait accompli, this principle of participation for sustainable development implies forging or consolidating partnerships, so that risk management is not left exclusively to decision-makers and experts. Such partnerships require a permanent policy of information enhancement, education and public awareness, from the very first stages of working out these policies. Methods must, moreover, continue to be developed to encourage participation by individual citizens and more effective consideration of their opinions (such as public consultations).

788. In addition to strengthening policies encouraging or broadening mechanisms of participation, the establishment of a sustainable pattern of development will also draw support from voluntary participation by all actors: public authorities, consumers, producers, workers, other major social groups... In championing sustainable production and consumption patterns, everyone can, as a citizen, exercise responsibility over the whole life cycle of goods and services:

789. - at one end of the economic chain, the producer has the essential responsibility for considering, in production decisions, the effects on the environment that a product will have throughout its life cycle. This presupposes an integration of strategies of design and upstream aspects of product manufacture, such as the choice of materials, and of the downstream effects, recyclability and disposal costs⁸⁰. Workers must be actively associated with these strategies and the choices they involve, so as to play their civic role to the full. Respect for international labour standards is also one of the producer's responsibilities;

790. - at the other end of the economic chain, consumers have the responsibility to favour the purchase of goods and services that benefit the natural and social environment and to use with care the natural resources that satisfy their needs;

791. - as for the public authorities, they have the responsibility of providing "the overarching framework of incentives, infrastructure, regulation and leadership that will enable other actors to take up their part of the chain from production to consumption and final disposal".⁸¹ They are also responsible for the proper management (economy, efficiency, effectiveness) of the nation's capacities and of public expenditure. In this way, they can harmonise and support, in the collective interest, responsible behaviour on the part of all actors.

80 OECD (1998). Towards sustainable consumption. Review of member states' initiatives. Paris: OECD.

81 Oslo Ministerial Round Table (1995).

ABBREVIATIONS

ALE	Agence locale pour l'emploi – <i>Local Employment Agency</i>
AMPERE	Commission pour l'Analyse des Modes de Production de l'Electricité et le Redéploiement des Energies - <i>Commission for the Analysis of Methods for the Generation of Electricity and the Re-evaluation of Energy Vectors</i>
BEF	Belgian francs (1BEF = 0.02478 EURO)
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy (of the European Union)
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCPIE	Comité de coordination de la politique internationale de l'environnement - <i>Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy</i>
CDM	Clean development mechanism
CEN	Centre d'études nucléaires – <i>Centre for Nuclear Studies</i>
CEPE	Commission sur l'étiquetage et la publicité écologiques – <i>Environmental Advertising and Labelling Committee</i>
CFDD	Conseil fédéral du Développement durable – <i>Federal Council for Sustainable Development</i>
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy (of the European Union)
CIDD	Commission Interdépartementale pour le Développement durable – <i>Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development</i>
CPAS	Centre public d'aide sociale – <i>Public Centre for Social Aid</i>
EMAS	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
EPD	Eco-product development
EU	European Union
FCCC	<i>See UNFCCC</i>
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GMO	Genetically modified organism
HACCP	Hazard analysis critical control point
HFC	Hydrofluorocarbons
IBN	Institut belge de normalisation – <i>Belgian Institute for Standardisation</i>
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPP	Integrated product policy
IRE	Institut des radio-éléments – <i>Institute for Radio-Isotopes</i>
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
LPG	Liquid petroleum gas

OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ONDRAF	Organisme national des déchets radioactifs et des matières fissiles enrichies – <i>Belgian National Agency for Radioactive Waste and Enriched Fissile Material Management</i>
OSPAR	Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
OSTC	Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs
PARCOM	Paris Commission (for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic)
PFC	Perfluorocarbons
R&D	Research and development
RER	Réseau express régional – <i>Regional express rail network</i>
REU	Rational energy use
SDIA	Sustainable development impact assessment
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SNCB	Société nationale des chemins de fer belges – <i>Belgian National Railways</i>
PADD	Plan d'appui scientifique à une politique de développement durable - <i>Scientific Support Plan for Sustainable Development Policy</i>
TRIPs	Trade-related intellectual property rights
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nation Conference on Trade and Development
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VAT	Value added tax
VOC	Volatile organic compounds
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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