



Contribution to the European Union's public consultation on the Europe 2020 strategy

1. Article 3 (3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) names sustainable development as a cross-cutting task for the European Union. In 2001, the EU adopted its first Sustainable Development Strategy. This was overhauled in 2006 and most recently amended in 2009. The overall aim of the strategy is to continuously improve quality of life for people in the European Union. EU measures are intended to help create sustainable communities, use resources efficiently and encourage environmentally and socially sound growth.
2. In 2010, the European Union adopted the Europe 2020 strategy, with a view to generating smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union by the year 2020. The strategy is implemented and monitored in the context of the European Semester, an annually recurring process.
3. In October 2012, the EU Environment Council called on the European Commission to review the European Sustainable Development Strategy, not least in order to incorporate the Rio+20 follow-up measures. In November 2012, the German Bundestag called for the continuation of the European Sustainable Development Strategy. The European SDS provided, the Bundestag said, a “cross-sectoral framework for further EU strategies” as well as being a “vitally needed basis for national sustainable development strategies”. The European Commission has not yet complied with the request thus supported by the German Bundestag. Instead it has stated that, in its view, the Europe 2020 strategy takes adequate account of the issue of sustainability.
4. The Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (hereafter referred to by its German acronym PBNE) hopes that this contribution will help strengthen the position of sustainable development within the European Union. It hopes that the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy will provide impetus for a review and revision of the European Sustainable Development Strategy. This would enable the manifest shortcomings of the Europe 2020 strategy to be compensated for until it expires in 2020.
5. The PBNE regrets that the European Commission has not revised the European Sustainable Development Strategy since 2006, notwithstanding the request made by the Environment Council in October 2012 and in spite of the Strategy's affirmation by the European Council in its Conclusions of 11 December 2009 (paragraphs 21 and 22). The European Sustainable Development Strategy is outdated. The world has changed dramatically over the past years. Policy-makers in the European Union and its now 28 member states have reacted accordingly. However, the European Sustainable Development Strategy does not at present adequately reflect the changed situation.
6. The PBNE is of the opinion that the European Sustainable Development Strategy must be continued with, notwithstanding the existence of the Europe 2020 strategy. It is true that Europe 2020 also covers certain aspects of the Sustainable Development Strategy. As a



whole, however, its focus is not on sustainable development across the board, in all policy areas, but on generating growth. At heart, Europe 2020 is an economic development strategy. The European Sustainable Development Strategy is considerably broader than the objectives of Europe 2020 allow. For example, Europe 2020 neglects the domains of public health, sustainable transport and natural resources. It also ignores global partnership, i.e. fighting poverty worldwide. EU principles such as the promotion and protection of fundamental rights and guarantees for an open and democratic society are likewise not mentioned. The European Sustainable Development Strategy is therefore more comprehensive with regard to the spectrum of issues covered, and is thus better able to serve as a framework strategy than Europe 2020. It is not without cause that the European Sustainable Development Strategy mentions utilising synergies between itself and the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs, the predecessor to Europe 2020. There is, furthermore, a fundamental difference between the two strategies in that the European Sustainable Development Strategy looks far beyond the time horizon of Europe 2020, precisely because its objective is continuous sustainable development. The objectives of Europe 2020 are to be reached by 2020. In contrast, the European Sustainable Development Strategy sets out to identify and elaborate measures to promote the sustainable development of the European Union, defined as the continuous improvement of the quality of life for present and future generations.

7. The broader multidisciplinary approach taken by the European Sustainable Development Strategy was also adopted by the German Sustainable Development Strategy. The 38 indicators contained in the national strategy go far beyond the indicators used in Europe 2020, as they also specify goals relating, for example, to the intensity of goods transport and organic farming. Because it is more detailed, the German Sustainable Development Strategy provides a better framework for action by the German Federal Government and the Bundestag than the Europe 2020 strategy. However, the German Sustainable Development Strategy only applies to Germany. The national strategies of the remaining 27 EU member states likewise only apply to individual countries. A European sustainable development strategy is vital in order to place the 28 national strategies within a European reference framework.
8. Europe 2020 cannot foster respect for democracy and fundamental rights by the EU states. This can only be done through the European Sustainable Development Strategy, which contains a reference to the political principles of the European Union – the yardstick by which all policies adopted by the European institutions and member states are judged. The debate over the last few years concerning some member states' adherence to EU values and principles highlights the need for a strategy which ensures that sustainable development is pursued by the member states in line with these values and principles.
9. The PBNE advocates that once a draft for a renewed European Sustainable Development Strategy has been submitted, a European Parliament committee on the issue should be convened, as should a permanent Council working party on sustainable development. These entities should be involved in the implementation of the European Sustainable Development Strategy. In particular, the Council working party could help ensure better coordination of the 28 national sustainable development strategies. The PBNE welcomes the decision taken by the President-Elect of the European Commission to place sustainable development within the remit of the First Vice-President, as had been requested by numerous members of the European Parliament in a joint letter to Jean-



Claude Juncker, the Commission President-Elect, on 17 September 2014. As the Commission President's designated right hand man, the First Vice-President will be responsible for both better regulation and for observance of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and will thus be the appropriate coordinator within the European Commission for the issue of sustainable development.

10. In 2010, the European Court of Auditors reported that the majority of users from within the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament viewed the EU impact assessment process, used to evaluate the consequences of EU policies, as helpful. EU impact assessments, currently prepared by the European Commission for those initiatives from its work programme which it considers to be particularly important, should be conducted in the same way as the PBNE's review process. This would mean preparing EU impact assessments for all treaty amendments, regulations, directives, strategies, actions, positions, decisions, recommendations and opinions. Such an increase in the workload would require appropriate administrative structures with, in particular, an adequate number of properly qualified staff. It would make sense for the European institutions to develop a joint impact assessment process, so that the process is not biased towards one institution or another.
11. In the past years, the Europe 2020 strategy has helped focus member states' policies on common goals. The European Semester has, in particular, proven to be a good, albeit soft governance instrument. The European Union should retain this instrument and ensure that the process is not fragmented for political reasons, for example by separating out the submission of National Reform Programmes on the one hand, and National Social Reports on the other. Europe 2020 is an internally coherent strategy, and should be treated as such, in order to boost the mutually supportive nature of its goals. The same is also true of the European Sustainable Development Strategy, which should be viewed as an overarching strategy providing a framework for all sector-specific EU strategies, in order to achieve the goals and values of the European Union whilst advancing sustainable development.
12. In one year's time, the member states of the United Nations want to have agreed on universally applicable sustainable development goals. Then they will move on to the fine tuning, to laying down concrete targets for all member states. The EU member states should work together during both the drafting of the universally applicable sustainable development goals and the implementation phase. A European sustainable development strategy will be an absolute necessity during both phases. It will also be necessary to align the cohesion funds accordingly, in order to reach the goals in the specified timeframe. This is a complex task which likewise requires a multidisciplinary sustainable development strategy at European level.