Why an international dialogue on sustainability and growth?

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Paper for the kick-off meeting

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Dear representatives of the Embassies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa; dear members of the German Bundestag and representatives of the German government; dear Ms Donner; dear Mr Eisenblätter; ladies and gentlemen!

I am delighted that we have gathered here today in order to kick off a project which has been established through the joint efforts of the German Council for Sustainable Development and the GTZ. I would especially like to thank the GTZ for taking this initiative. We were more than happy to do so. For us, this is a two-fold premiere.

This is the first time that we have entered into a project cooperation of this nature with a shared responsibility among the project partners.

And it is the first time that we have talked about a project in its roll-out phase. We normally don't do this because we usually don't make any announcements but talk about the results of our work. BRICS+G, however, is an exception. In this case, such an approach is absolutely necessary because we're in the process of starting a project whose results and outcome are not yet known. It is new territory. It is an experiment.

I'm not going to give you an overview of how the project will run, since we'll see and experience many surprises. I would rather like to use this opportunity to describe our motivation for this dialogue project.

I

Why a BRICS+G dialogue project; why on growth and sustainability? The German Council for Sustainable Development has, among other things, recommended to the German government not simply to indulge in self-contemplation with its national Sustainability Strategy. Sustainability is an issue which needs to be tackled at a global level. The German government has taken up this recommendation. In its work, its decisions and programmatic announcements, the government has devoted much of its attention to global responsibility and how Germany can contribute to development cooperation.

The Sustainability Strategy of the German government – and, even more so, the Progress Report 2004 – are very impressive documents that have paved the way for many changes. We acknowledged this in our recent statement of January this year. We, of course, also mentioned aspects where the German government has room for improvement.

I am mentioning this connection because I think that the benchmarks that we apply for criticizing papers and concepts elaborated and presented by the German government also need to be applied to our own work, but with a sense of proportion and to an appropriate degree, of course.

That's why, almost immediately after our appointment, we at the German Council for Sustainable Development did everything we could to ensure that the international perspective is always taken into account.

- On the occasion of the UN World Summit 2002 in Johannesburg and together with our council member, Klaus Töpfer, we highlighted future opportunities for dealing with globalisation and sustainability and, most notably, made suggestions as to how to improve the international framework within the UN with regard to economic, ecological and social aspects.
- At European level, we have already launched some initiatives. Together with the British Commission for Sustainable Development, we're seeing to it that the sustainability councils of the EU member states are given a much stronger voice in Brussels.
- We're following very closely what our European neighbours are doing and maintaining a lively exchange of information with them. Only recently, we presented the results of these activities in a benchmark study on "Sustaining Sustainability". In June, a learning workshop will be offered by the European sustainability councils which, as you all know, come together to exchange experiences. French president, Jacques Chirac, has commissioned an external peer review for his national sustainability strategy. I think this is a very good and very exciting idea which begs to be copied.

In summary, a lot of things have been initiated in Europe which, by the way, are also urgently required given the sluggish and insufficient European Neighbourhood Policy.

However, globally speaking, it is still early days: an organized exchange of experiences on sustainability strategies involving civil society institutions and industry does not exist at present.

From my perspective, this is actually quite surprising. Because there are so many reasons for being curious. What lessons can be learned, what can be transferred?

The first reason is that national sustainability strategies are a highly topical political instrument. What we see today is not the end of the nation state, but a highly exciting interplay between multilateralism on the one hand, and responsibility and the power of nation states to shape policies, on the other. The decision taken at the 1992 World Summit in Rio de Janeiro to set in motion a whole series of multilateral environmental agreements and, at the same time, to oblige the nation states of the world to develop their own national sustainability strategies was a far-sighted one.

Another reason for being curious can be seen in the problem which is causing us all severe headaches: Germany is searching for a new type of growth. Growth which creates jobs, which is, wherever possible, detached from resource consumption, which embraces global responsibility and does not divide society but creates future prospects for everybody.

We, in Germany, are still a long way from achieving this. That is also why we're very much interested in this exchange. It's not a one-way street. It's about carefully listening and understanding what issues and solutions others deal with during their workshops.

The concept of sustainability might still sound cumbersome to some people. But if it is taken seriously and not misused as an empty political slogan, the idea of sustainability can become a growth formula. It promotes a kind of growth which does not simply focus on having *more and more* but on being *better and better*. However, this insight has yet to be broadly acknowledged either by politicians or by the economy. But we will need them both, as indeed we will also need civil society. The sustainability enterprise can only be successful, if everybody contributes.

I'd like to know how sustainability is discussed and seen in those BRICS countries that have dynamic growth figures and that are predicted to dominate the world market in the near future. I'm interested in finding out people's attitudes in these countries towards handling resources, towards energy supply security, climate and climate change, the social dimension of societal development, and the prosperity gap.

Curiosity also exists with regard to the economic structure of Germany. We, the German Council for Sustainable Development, have repeatedly raised the question – the most recent case being in the context of energy policy and most especially relating to the clean use of coal – as to who in the future will actually come up with the required major technical progress and innovations which are in the offing: which economy is the most likely to make the major technological leaps towards hydrogen and solar industry, a new mobility, and sustainable production and consumption patterns?

And, at the same time, we are, of course, interested in finding out the experiences being made in the different countries with the help of the national sustainability strategy.

II

Ladies and gentlemen, focusing on the so-called BRICS countries also implies political questions. Why this selection? What do these countries have in common? What is behind Germany's dialogue offer which we have recently compiled?

It is an undeniable fact that the political world map is undergoing dramatic changes. Things will probably change even faster in the future than was the case in the past. It is already clear today that the political topography will follow the regional distribution of economic power. This holds true for the entire world and you don't need to be a prophet to be able to predict that in future the political architecture will become even more mosaic-like, non-simultaneous, complicated, but also more dynamic.

The BRICS countries are at the centre of these changes to the security architecture, economic relations and ecological tolerance. Globalisation as we know it today will also partly change; it will, in part, take on a different face. Some are already talking of the Asian globalisation with regard to India and China. New rules of the game will and

must be written. The future viability of the world will also depend on how we deal with the change of the old order.

Our dialogue project does not forestall any political-diplomatic initiative. Our dialogue does not take place at state level. We do not intend to sign a diplomatically relevant final declaration which needs to be negotiated in some shape or form. Our dialogue project is no more than its title implies, i.e. an exchange of experiences and opinions between experts and the responsible players. But I would also hasten to add that it should be no less than this.

I'd like to close with a personal remark. In presenting the report of his North-South-Commission 25 years ago, Willi Brandt introduced the first milestone for a policy that would be viable in the future and also transcend national borders. Shortly afterwards, the World Commission on Environment and Development, the so-called Brundtland Commission, recommended the establishment of a strategic link between environmental protection and economic development. I had the honour of representing Germany in the Brundtland Commission. We successfully put the term "sustainable development" on the political agenda and suggested that the heads of state should deal with the underlying concept. This laid the foundation for the World Summit on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The summit took up this idea. Agenda 21 has become a cornerstone of global politics. And rightfully so.

And it will remain a cornerstone. This is not always perceptible in modern-day politics. But when it comes down to the wire, the Agenda 21 approach provides an important guideline. And, therefore, the German government has rightly said in the context of sustainability that: "Sustainability is the recurrent theme to guide us into the 21st century." The "Sustainability and Growth" dialogue seeks to make it abundantly clear to us what is at stake in this One World.

Today marks the beginning of the BRICS+G project. As already said, it is not meant to be a panacea but is designed to improve our orientation. I hope that you are as excited as me about the dialogue process. I cordially invite you to follow the process vigilantly and, whenever possible, to actively shape it.