

## For an ambitious European and global sustainability policy – Germany’s special responsibility

Contribution by the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) to the meeting of the State Secretaries’ Committee for Sustainable Development on 27 May 2019 concerning “European and global sustainability policy”<sup>1</sup>

Berlin, 11 April 2019

In view of the meeting on 27 May 2019, the RNE would like to highlight in particular Germany’s special responsibility in 2019 and 2020, which stems from the country’s membership of the UN Security Council and its presidency of the Council of the European Union and coincides with a pivotal moment for European and global sustainability policy. This means that Germany can make a real difference during this time and has a responsibility to take ambitious, comprehensible steps towards sustainability and to launch clear initiatives at both European and global level and promote their implementation. By contrast, any hesitation to embrace this responsibility would have a direct, negative impact on the likelihood of achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The following recommendations are aimed at actively seizing this special responsibility.

Common sense is under fire. Increasingly isolationist governments are initiating and encouraging a constant erosion of international cooperation in the world. Multilateral conflict resolution is a keystone of our world order, covering everything from peace policy and the free, responsible trading of goods and services to climate protection. While some things may not correspond to our values and goals, anything is better than aggressively rejecting multilateralism. People all around the world have paid a high price to live side by side relatively successfully. However, this price would be far higher if the shared benchmarks of respect, mutual consideration, dialogue and common sense were to fall by the wayside. With that in mind, it is crucial to strengthen multilateral cooperation wherever possible at present.

2019 and 2020 will determine the course for the future. The United Nations will mark its 75th anniversary in 2020. In September 2019, its members will meet to discuss the 2030 Agenda for

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<sup>1</sup> The RNE regularly comments on the international dimension of the sustainability strategy and the significance of multilateral cooperation for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. These recommendations form the basis of this contribution and are not repeated in detail here.

Sustainable Development, international climate protection and funding for developing countries. Achieving success here will be indicative of what is to come in the future.

## **I. Recommendations for the German Federal Government**

When it comes to sustainability and climate protection, Germany has a greater, new and special responsibility.

We advise the Federal Government to explain publicly and powerfully what is at stake and what is being done to repulse attacks on the principle of collective responsibility and to instead strengthen multilateralism. In our view, there are three interrelated political cornerstones here:

1. Do not reveal any weak points: opponents of a multilateral approach should not be given any opportunity to undo the package of agreements from 2015 or restrict the United Nations' scope for action. Quite the opposite: the United Nations must be strengthened.
2. No conciliation: tactically evading conflicts by playing them down would only diminish the importance of Europe and Germany even further. Europe and Germany must rediscover and raise their shared voice.
3. Go on the offensive with implementation: the starting point for an offensive strategy is obvious. It consists of strict implementation of the SDGs. Although 'implementation' may initially sound more administrative and not overly political, this impression is misleading. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda is a top-level task.

We advise the Federal Government to take an offensive approach to implementation of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement – and to do so internationally and at the highest level. The link between home-grown measures and the universal sustainability goals must be made regularly and repeatedly.

We advise the Federal Government to make it absolutely clear to the European partners and the general worldwide public that the 2030 Agenda

- is changing German politics for the better;
- is already inspiring a large number of positive practical examples in Germany's municipalities which are linked to the reality of people's lives;
- is triggering investments and creating business opportunities;
- is prompting new processes and effective policies, cf. the 2018 peer review of the German Sustainable Development Strategy, the Sustainability Code and the National German Sustainability Award;
- and that Germany must therefore make a commitment to the ambitious (even further-reaching) implementation of the Agenda in, with and by Germany.

At the same time, it is crucial to highlight the growing and increasingly urgent need for more, wider-ranging action and suitable, creative models to fund sustainable development. The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) has already submitted relevant recommendations on this to the State Secretaries' Committee<sup>2</sup> and covered the issue in its recommendations on the HLPF. The European Development Fund should also be opened up for sustainability strategies aimed explicitly at fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

We advise the Federal Chancellor to use the UN summit on 24/25 September 2019 as an opportunity for political waymarking that is perceived by the public as a Leitkultur of sustainability. The Federal Government should explain:

- a) Which targets in the 2030 Agenda are to be achieved successfully before 2030 with the aid of the German Sustainable Development Strategy and how;
- b) How the Federal Government intends to achieve the targets (chemistry, conservation) set in the Agenda for 2020 and/or how it will assist partners with this; and, in the case of non-attainment of the 2020 goals, how it will support the political processes needed to continue pursuing these goals in the Agenda;
- c) How the Federal Government intends to lift the many and varied Agenda initiatives within Germany to establish a Leitkultur of sustainability;
- d) How Germany's development policy is intensifying cooperation on the 2030 Agenda with partner countries and turning the promotion of an effective institutional sustainability architecture into a standard for bilateral and multilateral cooperation;
- e) How greater global use of Agenda solutions developed by companies and municipalities in Germany is being made possible;
- f) How Germany is helping alliances of early achiever states to attain some of the targets in the 2030 Agenda ahead of time and how Germany is promoting transnational networks of stakeholder bodies;
- g) What Germany intends to tackle during the HLPF's next working period (2019–2023) and what contribution Germany intends to make to this during its presidency of the Council of the European Union;
- h) How Germany will deal with the deficits in SDG implementation which are apparent today.

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<sup>2</sup> Sustainable finance. The Federal Government's supporting role. Recommendation from the German Council for Sustainable Development to the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development on 25 February 2019 on the topic of sustainable finance. Berlin, 8 February 2019 ([https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190208\\_RNE\\_Statement\\_Sustainable-Finance.pdf](https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190208_RNE_Statement_Sustainable-Finance.pdf)).

Furthermore, we advise the Federal Government to work at an international level to promote the inclusion of civil society in both European and global sustainability policy and to protect it from the ever-growing restrictions.

## II. Actively strengthening multilateral cooperation

Strengthening multilateral cooperation must be the prime concern of Germany's foreign policy. Germany must coordinate its political, economic, technological and cultural weight better in order to counteract isolationist tendencies.

The following recommendations by the RNE on strengthening multilateral cooperation concentrate on collaboration within the UN system and the strategic expansion of an SDG trade partnership with Africa.

### a) For ambitious collaboration within the UN system

Germany's dedicated backing for stronger multilateral institutions is not solely a question of how the UN system is funded, but this consideration does play a major role. The RNE supports the UN Secretary-General's proposal of a Funding Compact which strengthens the multilateral infrastructure as a whole. At present, this is overly dependent on short-term, project-based funds. The UN Secretary-General's reform efforts based on the recommendations of the Töpfer/Somavia committee and its approach oriented comprehensively on implementation of the 2030 Agenda are heading in the right direction and should continue to be supported by the Federal Government.

The RNE further refers back to its recommendations concerning the central body for global sustainability, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).<sup>3</sup> The HLPF should be strengthened, in particular by means of its ambitious use as an interactive reporting and information-sharing platform and as an annual meeting point where strategic implementation partnerships can be concluded. Germany should also promote this political, action-based understanding of the HLPF within the transnational networking platforms which it supports, such as Partners for Review and Open SDGclub.Berlin.

The RNE would like the Federal Government to continue and expand the successful 2030 Agenda Transformation Fund.<sup>4</sup>

We consider it expedient to hold a national preparatory conference on the HLPF and advise the Federal Government to use this as an opportunity to present its ideas for the further development of the HLPF.

### b) For a strong SDG trade partnership with Africa

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<sup>3</sup>Steering global sustainability away from a dead end. The RNE's recommendations to the German Federal Government for enhancing multilateralism for the 2030 Agenda. Statement on the reform of the HLPF.

Berlin, 24 August 2018 ([https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RNE\\_statement\\_HLPF\\_Governance.pdf](https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RNE_statement_HLPF_Governance.pdf)).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.2030transformationfund.com/>.

We believe that a comprehensive partnership between Europe and Africa is an important peace project in the context of sustainable development and are delighted that we can obviously build on a Franco-German consensus here.<sup>5</sup> Together, the two continents will account for a third of the world's population in 2050. Migration, environmental protection, and the search for affluence and a dignified life make for extremely close links between the continents. The future of one relies on the success of the other. Future-proof jobs and opportunities for people depend on democratic structures where law and order hold sway.

With this in mind, the RNE spoke out during the German G20 presidency in favour of a strong partnership with Africa and called for (trade) policy and economic relations to be geared towards the joint implementation of the global sustainability agenda.<sup>6</sup> We would like to reiterate these recommendations and expand on them as follows:

The EU and the ACP states are currently in negotiations on the successor to the Cotonou Agreement. The RNE supports the negotiation strategy of entering into specific agreements with the three regions in question as part of an overarching EU-ACP treaty. A new treaty must set the goals and principles of the 2030 Agenda as its foundation and be geared towards their realisation. This contractual agreement – which would affect almost 100 states – and the public investments aimed at supporting its execution would also send a strong signal to investors and firms. This is also in the joint economic interest of the regions affected and Europe. Introducing binding due diligence obligations relating to both human rights and environmental issues could be a good means of ensuring that private direct investments comply with sustainability criteria.

In addition to the 2030 Agenda, relevant considerations on the African side include the proposed new single continental market and the goals of the Agenda 2063 agreed by the African Union. We therefore welcome the European Commission's proposal for a new Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investments and Jobs, whose intended measures include steps to support the African Continental Free Trade Area, enhance qualifications at continental and national level, and expand dialogue, collaboration and support on issues relating to the investment and business climate.<sup>7</sup> A prime example of an SDG link between the EU and Africa could be the circular economy and recycling. Currently, the circular economy in Africa is in part disastrous and at best precarious, especially with regard to scrap vehicles, electronic waste, solar technology and plastic. The circular economy remains a challenge for Europe and Germany too, which have by far not yet tapped the full gamut of possibilities. The measures put in place to date fall far short of the mark.<sup>8</sup> Far too much is still exported, while technical possibilities remain unused. Companies in the recycling industry need fresh impetus and the concept of a circular economy must become better established at all

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<sup>5</sup> See the speech given by Chancellor Merkel at the conference on the G20 Compact with Africa on 30 October 2018 and the appeal made by President Macron on 5 March 2019.

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive G20 partnership with Africa to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Recommendation of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) for the German Government. Berlin, March 2017 ([https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/RNE\\_Recommendations\\_comprehensive\\_G20\\_partnership\\_with-Africa\\_to\\_implement\\_the\\_UN\\_2030\\_Agenda.pdf](https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/RNE_Recommendations_comprehensive_G20_partnership_with-Africa_to_implement_the_UN_2030_Agenda.pdf)).

<sup>7</sup> European Commission: Communication concerning a new Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investments and Jobs: taking our partnership for investment and jobs to the next level (COM(2018) 643 final) dated 12 September 2018.

<sup>8</sup> A detailed insight into the progress of efforts at EU level can be found in the Commission's recent report on implementation of the Circular Economy Action Plan COM 2019 (190 final) dated 4 March 2019.

companies and among consumers. Germany could provide an initial spur by promoting an industrial infrastructure for the collection and recycling of reusable materials in Africa. Landfill engineering, sorting, reuse and recycling promise technological progress, good jobs and training opportunities if they are organised in such a way that they support Africa's internal market. Exports from Germany should primarily be promoted when they serve SDGs and are orientated towards Africa's internal market. Politically speaking, the RNE recommends supporting the African Union's efforts to establish the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Germany already plays an active role in the field of global health protection, which offers another natural link upon which a strong SDG partnership with Africa could be built. As part of the reform discussion concerning the global health architecture, the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Malaria and Tuberculosis should be developed into an instrument for the broader strengthening of health systems. This would be an essential building block for the further expansion of basic social protection. Achieving this is reliant on a widening of the Fund's mandate and finance. A particularly important element is its work to support women's sexual and reproductive rights with a view to reducing the high mortality rates among mothers and children. The opportunities for digitally supported health solutions – especially for and with Africa – should be utilised in full.

### **III. European sustainability policy**

Strengthening multilateral cooperation for sustainable development requires a proactive European policy. The global impact of an outstanding commitment on the part of the European Union and the Member States to implement the 2030 Agenda should not be underestimated. We advise the Federal Government to turn the triad of the German Sustainable Development Strategy – “in, with and by Germany” – into a European one: “in, with and by the EU”.

We welcome the European Council's conclusions from 9 April 2019 and advise the Federal Government to continue supporting use of these as a benchmark for the forthcoming fundamental financial and strategic decisions at EU level. The European Council has once again asked the Commission to present in 2019 an implementation strategy “outlining timelines, objectives and concrete measures to reflect the 2030 Agenda and mainstream the SDGs in all relevant EU internal and external policies, based on what more needs to be done until 2030, in terms of EU policy, legislation, governance structures for horizontal coherence and means of implementation”.<sup>9</sup> This is a matter of particular urgency.

The European Commission has prompted a strategy discussion with its reflection paper “Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030”.<sup>10</sup> The German Council for Sustainable Development welcomes the Commission's positive stance, which signals an end to its previously held view that the EU

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<sup>9</sup> Council conclusions dated 9 April 2019 “Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030”: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39019/st08286-en19.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Approved on 30 January 2019: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/rp\\_sustainable\\_europe\\_30-01\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/rp_sustainable_europe_30-01_en_web.pdf). The European Parliament supported this with comments made on 14 March 2019; see Annual Strategic Report on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals, P8\_TA-PROV(2019)0220.

sustainability strategy was contained within the Europe 2020 strategy. The German Federal Government, the Bundestag and the RNE had repeatedly contested this attitude.

The Commission's new approach of highlighting the necessary policy coherence between sectoral EU policies and within the EU's multi-level system is overdue and must become the guiding principle for the EU's whole course of action in the 2019–2024 period. The RNE advises the Federal Government to use this as the benchmark when it adopts its positions on the constitutional and strategic decisions which are on the agenda at EU level this year. We also expect the Government to oppose the Commission entering into any further commitments which go against implementation of the 2030 Agenda; this applies in particular to efforts to reform the CAP, where sustainable agriculture and a sustainable food sector should be strengthened. The CAP reform can and must show that Europe is moving away from the principles of the old agricultural policy and actively embracing both the spirit and the letter of the SDGs.

Aside from fundamental questions of the new Commission's composition and course of action, the Federal Government should also argue for the Council of the European Union to adopt this strategic approach and request that the Commission submit an overarching action plan containing concrete policy proposals on the four key areas named in the paper.<sup>11</sup> In our opinion, the priorities at community level are stepping up efforts to establish a circular economy (SDG 9), reducing social inequality between and within Member States (SDG 10), taking a fair approach to meeting the cost of rectifying urgent environmental damage, practical steps towards sustainable consumption (SDG 12), and strengthening inner-European peer learning regarding sustainability strategies (SDG 17). Clear steps to implement the other SDGs – especially the equal treatment of women (SDG 5) – are no less pressing. Subsidiary action across multiple levels is called for here.

The EU's approach to implementation of the 2030 Agenda must go beyond internal policy measures and view the whole range of external policy instruments, the EU's diplomatic soft skills for peacekeeping, development finance, the Eastern Partnership and trade policy together. In trade policy in particular, this means the approaches used to date for sustainability articles in the trade agreements should be applied more strategically while also considering the detrimental effects of these trade relations on sustainable development in trade partner countries.<sup>12</sup> The Federal Government should reaffirm the lessons learnt from the external evaluation of the EU policy coherence for development pertaining to the 2009–2016 period. Furthermore, it should work to ensure that possible repercussions of EU measures for developing countries are systematically considered in impact assessments and that EU delegations are routinely involved in such analyses.<sup>13</sup>

We welcome the fact that the Commission is paving the way for further discussions by putting forward three possible courses of action for the EU. We explicitly support the proposal of an

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<sup>11</sup> The circular economy, food systems, energy/mobility/construction and social security, plus the enabling interdisciplinary areas of education/research/development, rules-based free trade and governance.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the proposals of the IEEP: "Commission's Reflection Paper on a more sustainable Europe by 2030 – IEEP reaction & recommendations", 31 January 2019 (<https://ieep.eu/news/commission-s-reflection-paper-on-a-more-sustainable-europe-by-2030-ieep-reaction-and-recommendations>).

<sup>13</sup> Commission's working document: summary of the evaluation of the EU concept for policy coherence for development (SWD(2019) 93 final) dated 27 February 2019.

overarching sustainability strategy. However, this strategy must represent conceptual progress in comparison with the first EU sustainability strategy (Göteborg Strategy). It must build on the responsibilities in the EU's multi-level system and hold both the Member States and the European institutions to account in line with their respective responsibilities. Alongside the strategy process, a first step must be taken rapidly in the policy areas within the EU's remit.

The Council's conclusions on the reflection paper "A sustainable Europe by 2030" should send a strong signal for the summit in Sibiu that the European Union sees itself as a shaping force for the welfare of people and the planet – via global partnership. This commitment must be reflected in the Multiannual Financial Framework. We advise the Federal Government to seek out like-minded EU Member States for alliances of early achiever states, with whose help a certain global sustainability goal could be attained before 2030. We suggest selecting the reduction of food waste as this goal. Germany should undertake joint efforts with an initial group of Member States and set verifiable, ambitious targets, backed by monies from the EU Structural Funds, open to all Member States and supported by a multi-stakeholder peer review mechanism.

We expect Germany to decisively support the whole-of-society approach to a sustainability shift within the EU context as well. With this in mind, the Council of the European Union should back the continuation of the SDG multi-stakeholder platform in the new legislative period and strengthen it by incorporating a multi-level perspective (involving national multi-stakeholder bodies).

Germany's forthcoming presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2020 gives it an outstanding opportunity to turn the 2030 Agenda into the future agenda for the EU and forge ahead with fulfilment of the global Sustainable Development Goals. Europe's 2030 strategy must be a sustainability strategy. With the Aachen Treaty, we now have a forward-looking agreement which envisages overcoming transformation processes in a joint, transnational fashion. This bilateral collaboration is explicitly open to other EU Member States. In this way, transformation experience garnered in individual states – such as Spain and Germany's experiences of phasing out coal – can be Europeanised for the benefit of Europe's transformation. The EU's foreign trade policy must be designed with SDG considerations in mind.

Ultimately, what is at stake is nothing less than peace and international cooperation, opportunities for individuals and peoples, the preservation of the environment, and a life of dignity for all.