

FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPEAN UNION AND ROMANIA

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Abstract:

The paper reviews the concepts and strategies regarding sustainable development in European Union and Romania. The concept of sustainable development is built on the premise that human civilization is a sub-system of the Ecosphere and is dependent on its material and energy flows, on its stability and capacity for self-adjustment. Sustainable development is a common objective and a permanent preoccupation of the European Union Member States. For Romania as a Member State of the European Union, sustainable development is not one of several possible options, but the only rational prospect for advancement as a nation.

Key words: *sustainable development, European Union, Sustainable Development Strategy*

JEL classification: *R, R4, Q18*

1. Introduction

Sustainable development has developed as a concept through several decades of active international scientific debate and has acquired distinct political connotations in the context of globalization.

According to the World Commission on Sustainable Development (WCSD) report, also referred as the Brundtland Report "Our Common Future", 1987 (WCED 1987), sustainable development marks the ability of "humanity to /.../ ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The concept of sustainable development proposes an integrated policy and decision-making approach, in which environmental protection and long-term economic development are considered to be complementary and interdependent (Milea Oana Maria, 2012). Thus, the report called for the need to look beyond today's needs and short-term effects of decisions.

Henceforth, the complex problems of sustainable development acquired a global political dimension as they were tackled at the summit-level United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro (1992), the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, which adopted the Millennium Goals (2000) and the Earth Summit in Johannesburg (2002). Concrete programmes for action at global level were developed (such as Local Agenda 21) according to the principle «think globally, act locally».

A series of international conventions were adopted in the course of this process, spelling out precise obligations for states and strict implementation deadlines in such areas as climate change, biodiversity conservation, the protection of forests and wetlands, curbs on the use of certain chemicals, access to information regarding the state of the environment, and more.

Those agreements define the international legal space for the application of the aims and principles of sustainable development. It is thus widely recognized that the Earth has a limited capacity to meet the growing demand of the socio-economic systems for natural resources and to absorb the destructive effects of their overuse.

Climate change, soil erosion and desertification, the pollution of soil, water and air, the shrinking area of tropical forest systems and wetlands, the extinction or decline of a large number of aquatic and terrestrial species, the accelerated depletion of non-renewable natural resources have started to have measurable negative effects on the socio-economic development and on the quality of life of human populations in vast areas of the planet.

The concept of sustainable development is built on the premise that human civilization is a sub-system of the Ecosphere and is dependent on its material and energy flows, on its stability and capacity for self-adjustment.

2. European Union's sustainable development concept and strategy

Sustainable development has become a political objective of the European Union since the Maastricht Treaty of 1997. In 2001, at Goteborg, the European Council adopted the Sustainable Development Strategy of the European Union; an external dimension was added to it at the Barcelona Council in 2002.

The European Commission commenced the review process of the Strategy by publishing, in February 2005, a critical evaluation of the progress achieved since 2001 that also pointed to a series of directions for action to be further pursued. The document revealed some unsustainable tendencies affecting negatively the environment that could impact the future development of the European Union: climate change, threats to public health, poverty and social exclusion, depletion of natural resources and erosion of biodiversity.

Having identified those issues, in June 2005, the heads of state and government of the European Union Member States adopted a Declaration on the guidelines for sustainable development, including the revised Lisbon Agenda for Growth and Jobs as an essential component of the overarching sustainable development objective.

Following wide-ranging consultations, the European Commission presented, on 13 December 2005, a proposal to renew the 2001 Goteborg Strategy. As a result of that process, the European Union Council adopted, on 9 June 2006, the renewed Sustainable Development Strategy for the enlarged European Union space.

The document reflects a cohesive and coherent strategic vision with the general objective to develop further actions enabling the European Union to achieve continuous improvement of the quality of life for the present and future generations by creating sustainable communities that are capable to manage and use resources efficiently and to realize the potential of the economy for social and ecological innovation in order to provide prosperity, a better environment and social cohesion.

The European Union Sustainable Development Strategy, which provides the foundation for the National Strategy of Romania, is complementary to the Lisbon Strategy and is intended as a catalyst for those who draft public policies and for the public at large with an aim to change the behaviour of the European and Romanian societies, respectively, and to secure the active involvement of policy makers, both public and private, and individual citizens in the preparation, implementation and monitoring the objectives of sustainable development.

The European Union and its Member States have the responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy by involving all institutional components at national and EU levels. The importance of close collaboration towards the goals of sustainable development with the civil society, business, social partners, local communities and citizens is also underlined. Four key objectives are thus identified:

- Environmental protection through measures that make it possible to decouple economic growth from negative environmental impacts;
- Social equity and cohesion through observance of fundamental human rights, cultural diversity, gender equality and combating discrimination of any kind;
- Economic prosperity through the promotion of knowledge, innovation and competitiveness with an aim to ensure high living standards and full and high-quality employment;
- Meeting European Union's international responsibilities through the promotion of democratic institutions in the interest of peace, security, freedom and of the principles and practice of sustainable development throughout the world.

The strategy of sustainable development proposed by the European Commission for the European Union Member States is the Lisbon Agenda for growth and jobs. This concept involves development of new energy sources and minimizing the residues that affects the environment.

The sustainable development needs establishing the balance between the economic development, social equity and environment protection, in all regions of the planet. So, this concept cannot materialize without a real political will of an as higher as possible number of countries.

The Sustainable Development means a better quality at present and also for the future generations (Pascu Emilia, Paraian Elena, Stanciu Ion, 2012). According to the visions of the sustainable development, the progress integrates immediate and long term objectives, local and global actions, economic and environmental problems, all being inseparable. Such a vision upon the society cannot be imposed only by governmental policies, but the society as a whole, needs to adopt certain principles (political, economic, and social, of thinking).

European Union has a Strategy of Sustainable Development, that proposes itself goals and clear actions, related to seven, in majority environmental priorities: climate change and clean energy; sustainable transports; sustainable consumption and production; preservation and natural resources management; public health; social inclusion, demography and migration; poverty, sustainable development challenges at global level.

In order to make sure that the economic, environmental and socio-cultural components are integrated and correlated in a balanced manner, the Sustainable Development Strategy of the European Union sets the following guiding principles:

- Promotion and protection of fundamental human rights;
- Solidarity within and between generations;
- Open and democratic society;
- Information and active involvement of citizens in decision making;
- Involvement of businesses and social partners;
- Policy coherence and the quality of governance at local, regional, national and global levels;
- Integration of economic, social and environmental policies through impact evaluations and consultation of stakeholders;
- Use of best available knowledge to ensure that policies are economically sound and cost-effective;
- Application of the precautionary principle in case of scientific uncertainty;
- Application of the "make polluters pay" principle.

3. Romania's sustainable development concept and strategy

For Romania as a Member State of the European Union, sustainable development is not one of several possible options, but the only rational prospect for

advancement as a nation, resulting in the establishment of a new development paradigm at the confluence of economic (Apostol Diana, 2009), social and environmental factors.

A first National Strategy for Sustainable Development was prepared between 1997 and 1999 with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The Romania - European Union Treaty of Accession (2005) and other programmatic documents adopted in the pre-accession period include Romania's concrete commitments to put into practice the Community acquis, including the sustainable development principles.

As a result of the assumed obligations as an European Union member, the Romanian Government has elaborated and adopted in November 2008 the National Sustainable Development Strategy with the 2013-2020-2030 horizons, which sets concrete objectives for implementation in a reasonable and realistic timeframe for the sustainable development model, generates a high value added, is based on knowledge and innovation and is orientated towards the continuous improvement of the quality of life in harmony with the natural environment.

The strategy proposes a vision of sustainable development of Romania in relation to the following two decades, with objectives that transcend electoral cycles duration. The implementation of the sustainable development concept as a general guide to the European Union and as a Romania state policy requires a continuous effort to re-evaluate the assumptions accepted.

Strategy development process has demonstrated the value of active involvement of all social and political factors.

The development of the Strategy is the result of the obligation assumed by Romania as European Union member state, according to the objectives agreed at European Union level, particularly those stated in the Accession Treaty, the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs in the renewed European Union Strategy for Development Sustainable 2006.

Following extensive discussion of the project at national and regional level, with the active involvement of stakeholders and conceptual support of the Romanian Academy, Strategy offers a vision of Romania development in the perspective of the next two decades, with objectives that transcend electoral cycles and conjectural political preferences:

- horizon 2013: organic incorporation of the principles and practices of sustainable development in all programs and public policies of Romania;
- horizon 2020: reach the current average level of European Union countries for the main indicators of sustainable development;
- horizon 2030: Romania close to significant average level of European Union member states that year.

The implementation of these strategic objectives will ensure high rates of economic growth in the medium and long run and, as a result, a significant reduction of social and economic disparities between Romania and the other Member States of the European Union.

Sustainable Development Strategy sets the main guidelines for action towards the adoption and implementation of the principles of sustainable development in the immediate future:

- Rational correlation of development goals, including cross-sector and regional investment programmes, with the established potential and sustaining capacity of natural capital;
- Accelerated modernisation of the educational, training and public health systems with due consideration of the unfavourable demographic trends and their impact on the labour market;

➤ Use of the best available technologies, by both economic and ecological standards, for publicly funded investments at national, regional and local levels, and encouraging the choice of such technologies on the part of private investors; entrenchment of eco-efficiency standards in all production and service activities;

➤ The ability to anticipate the effects of climate change, to prepare solutions for adaptation in the long run and to develop cross-sector contingency plans comprising portfolios of alternative crisis-management solutions in case of natural or man-made disasters;

➤ Ensuring food security and safety by turning to good account Romania's comparative advantages with regard to increased agricultural production, including organic farming; balancing the quantitative and qualitative growth of agricultural output for human and animal consumption with the higher demand for biofuel production without compromising the need to maintain and improve soil fertility, biodiversity and environmental protection;

➤ The need to identify additional, sustainable financial resources for large-scale projects and programmes, particularly in areas such as infrastructure, energy, environmental protection, food safety, education, healthcare and social services;

➤ Protection and promotion of Romania's cultural and natural heritage; efforts to meet the European norms and standards on the quality of life should be pursued together with the revival of traditional occupations and ways of life in a modern setting, especially in high mountain areas and wetlands.

4. Conclusions

Sustainable development is a common objective and a permanent preoccupation of the European Union Member States. Romania, as an European Union member, has adopted this objective since the pre-accession period and is presently implementing the National Sustainable Development Strategy with 2013-2020-2030 horizons, which sets the main action directions in order to reach the stipulated objectives.

The sustainable development is not an easy target for Romania, because it must make up for the gaps towards the other European Union members through a sustained economic growth, or the economic growth is often accompanied by the increase in the volume of used resources, a situation which can be in contradiction with the principles of sustainable development. That is why the economic effort must achieve a continuous growth by obeying the sustainability principles.

The economic resources, the legal framework, the political options and achievements accomplished by Romania, through the harmonization of the sector policies to the environment policy of the European Union, show that in the past years the practices specific to sustainable development have extended, so that now real chances of a growing economic competitiveness on sustainable principles exist. In this manner, Romania joins the efforts of the member states in order to make the European Union the most dynamic and competitive economy in the world.

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