By Michelle French

The European Council’s Austrian Presidency took on a challenging task before its term ended in June: approval of a renewed Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) for an enlarged Europe. That meant a coherent, long-term plan to guide Europe toward more sustainable patterns of production and consumption, better policy integration, social solidarity and global responsibility — no easy task, given the complexity of Europe and its diverse stakeholders.

The European Commission issued its proposed strategy in December and the Austrian Presidency and European Council adopted a compromise text during their summit June 15-16. Yet long before this, discussion on the final text started. The first drafts of the text from the Commission met harsh criticism.

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB), a federation of more than 140 environmental citizens’ organisations, had been critical of the Commission’s proposal. “It’s lacking in vision, ambition, urgency, limits, targets, and timetables,” said John Hontelez, the group’s secretary general.

Back in June 2005, the Council signed on to a vigorous sustainable development strategy requesting targets and measures. The Council’s Declaration on Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development underscored the need for a greater sense of urgency regarding environmental concerns, and a solid analysis of unsustainable trends. The EEB said the Commission’s document didn’t meet these aims.

Speaking for business interests, the Confederation of European Business (UNICE), a group with 39 members from 33 countries, wrote to the Luxembourg Presidency last year urging decision makers to prioritise the Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth over a renewed sustainability strategy. “The SDS and its resulting actions must be fully consistent with the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs,” it wrote.
**Austrian legacy**  
(Continued from previous page)

Two days later, the June 2005 Council reinforced the role of the SDS as the overarching aim of the EU as enshrined in the Treaty of the European Union, and UNICE has been raising concerns ever since.

In February, UNICE released 10 recommendations for sustainable development policy. It called on the EU to prioritise global competitiveness over minimising its ecological footprint and advocated against binding targets which may threaten economic performance and discourage technological breakthroughs. It asked for more use of voluntary environmental agreements to give companies flexibility in implementation.

While sustainable development is nominally the EU’s overarching aim, it is the Lisbon Strategy that Brussels power brokers care most about, say many observers.

Hontelez argued that Lisbon obliges member states to take certain measures and report progress on an annual basis, while the sustainability strategy just encourages member states to take the initiative.

**EU leadership needed**

“The fact that we have one internal market with all kinds of rules, restrictions and obligations makes it an illusion to think that countries can embark on a sustainable development strategy independently,” Hontelez said.

He also argued that the EU’s main mechanism to factor economic, social, and economic dimensions into other sector policies — through extended impact assessments — leads decision makers to stress economic costs over environmental ones.

Thomas Beirnheim, an environmental economist with DG Environment, admitted that the Commission’s proposal was a compromise between various ministries, but that the integrated impact assessments have put the EU on the right course.

“The impact assessment is one way to improve the horizontal policy-making process,” said Beirnheim, adding that the Commission is still learning by doing, and is working to beef up the assessment process through training and finding ways to better measure environmental costs. He also noted that thinking about the global dimension of sustainable development is another means to “make sure our future policies are more coherent” and integrated.

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‘Lisbon obliges member states to take certain measures, the SDS just encourages them to take the initiative.’

John Hontelez, European Environmental Bureau

The antagonists agree some things, though. For instance, no group seems concerned over the strategy’s call to stimulate green industries by strengthening procurement policies.

In the end, according to the EurActiv EU news portal, “EU heads of states and government strengthened the review of the EU’s sustainable development strategy demanding more focus for sustainable production and consumption.”

The Austrian Presidency can be considered a success in that it managed to replace the Commission’s draft with more concrete, logical and challenging content. The strategy defines itself as the overall framework for the Lisbon Strategy — a positive step for believers in sustainability. Even so, concerns remain that the Lisbon Strategy may still justify developments that run counter to the SDS.

The SDS contains goals and objectives agreed by the European Council in June 2005, but it lacks more demanding targets and indicators; these are left for the Commission to elaborate.

The Austrian Presidency has left a solid document with good short-term measures (most importantly, fiscal reform), and more clearly defined responsibilities and tasks. It at least justifies developments that run counter to the SDS.
Venice builds bridges with industry

By Richard Filcak

Travelling to Venice from mainland Italy, you meet two parallel worlds at the edge of the Adriatic Sea. As you approach historic Venice, you pass an industrial zone of glass, chemical, and metallurgical factories; ship yards; and power plants. But as the chimneys, towers and long rows of workshops suddenly end, you cross a bridge into the famous Renaissance lagoon city, which is strictly protected by environmental law.

As in many places in Central and Eastern Europe, the accumulated impacts of heavy industry started to become environmental problems in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s. Several factors, including a legislative vacuum, demand for economic growth, and a lack of information on the impacts of chemicals, contributed to high levels of pollution.

Industry has left marks on Venice: cultural sites have been damaged by acid rain and during the 1980s and 1990s chemical waste was dumped without control into the lagoon, causing major scandals. The dumping of waste as well as the accidental leakage of toxic substances (by-products of PVC and polyurethane production) into the atmosphere tarnished the image of industry and challenged the co-existence of these two worlds.

Public backlash

With vocal public backing, the local and central administrations struck back by passing stronger environmental regulations and laws, and an era of antagonistic dealings between industry and government was underway. However, since the 1990s, industrial and historic Venice have been trying to cooperate rather than compete. Local officials realised that they need to involve industry more in environmental protection and companies realised that many principles of environmental management can help improve profits by increasing safety and conserving energy and raw materials.

The reclamation of old industrial facilities, the development of brown fields into parks, and — most of all — the development of environmental management schemes (e.g. ISO or the Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)) are among the approaches developed through cooperation between industry and public authorities.

Because of the success of the approaches developed in the industrial zone of Porto Marghera on the edge of Venice, participants in the recent Energy and Industry module of the Course for Sustainability visited the area to take a look. Participants learned about the Italian experience, talked to people from industry, and saw both opportunities and challenges in the Italian approach.

Most of the enterprises there belong to the Unindustria Venezia Association, which represents its members in negotiations with local and national authorities. The association participates in the development of new legislation, lobbies for member interests, and disseminates information about how owners can green their businesses (e.g. by implementing EMAS or ISO 14 000). Around 70 percent of its members are small and medium-sized firms that otherwise have difficulty paying for the necessary research and development, hiring staff trained in eco-business practices, or retaining environmental management consultants.

Speaking to course participants, Elena Bonafe, an environment and safety consultant from Unindustria Venezia, highlighted how associations can help introduce smaller firms to environmental management and certification practices.

Openness crucial

Galvene-Zincatura a Caldo Ltd. is one of the positive examples of such cooperation. The factory, which produces galvanised metal parts, is a source of various emissions into the water and air. But with financial support from the government and Unindustria’s know-how, the company implemented EMAS to address the pollution and prevent environmental accidents. External support was important, but, as was highlighted, the openness and interest of company management was also crucial. Giorgio Montresor, CEO of Galvene Ltd., is a new type of manager. Open to discuss environmental and social impacts, his factory relies upon its surroundings, and as such looks for ways to minimise environmental threats. He explained to course participants that the most difficult aspect of implementing an environmental management approach involves shifting traditional thinking.

“It’s all about the will to change. Once you decide and motivate the people, you find many ways to make your enterprise more environmentally friendly.” The energy and material savings, decreased pollution and better relationships with authorities and the public support his words. Such cooperation is not the final step towards sustainability in industrial production, but under certain circumstances, it may help.
New strategy should inspire, not perplex

By Alexios Antypas

The European Commission’s original Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) proposal, adopted at the Gothenburg Council Summit in 2001, arrived already mired in controversy and contention. At the time much was made of the fact that in between the 1999 Helsinki Summit, at which the Council called for the Commission to develop “a long-term strategy dovetailing policies for economically, socially, ecologically sustainable development,” and the Gothenburg Summit, the Council adopted the “Lisbon Strategy” for economic development. The Lisbon Strategy called for the EU “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.” No mention was made of the environment or ecological sustainability. Consequently, it was painfully unclear whether the two strategies were in hostile competition with each other, and, if not, how they could be integrated. The difficulties surrounding the SDS have continued throughout the duration of the SDS’s lifespan, and have finally resulted in the comprehensive review of 2005.

While many critiques of the proposal have been long on detail and technical competence, the fundamental issues fall into several simple categories. The original SDS:

• failed to establish a vision of a sustainable society across Europe;
• failed to generate public support;
• became viewed as a weak appendix to the Lisbon Strategy;
• did little more than endorse existing environmental policies; and
• focused on the environmental pillar and showed no initiative or imagination in regards to the social and economic pillars.

In regards to the environment, the SDS focused on three thematic areas: climate change, transport, and natural resources. The SDS also encompassed the area of public health, and made reference to the Lisbon Strategy’s goals in regard to combating poverty and social exclusion and the problems associated with an ageing society. The approach of the SDS — focusing on technically intensive policy areas that represent significant challenges in the EU — reflects the attitude taken by the political leadership at the EU level. In the words of then Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom, “While we do not know the precise recipe for achieving sustainability, we do know what is unsustainable. As a result, the EU’s journey has not been so much towards a fixed objective, but rather away from unsustainability — unsustainable use of chemicals, unsustainable greenhouse gas emissions, unsustainable resource use, etc.”

Consequently, to the extent that sustainable development requires technocratic solutions to environmental and social problems at the margins of a growth-driven and globalising economic system, the original sustainable development strategy was at least partially successful because it identified and aggregated such approaches in areas such as transport in which the EU as a whole is clearly failing.

However, while Wallstrom’s perspective makes some sense — it is easier to achieve agreement on incremental items of reform than it is to reach consensus on ultimate goals — it is indicative of the typical bane of Brussels: timidity and a lack of vision that could inspire the citizens of Europe. It is simply a common-sense fact that in the absence of broad social support and enthusiasm, the transition to a sustainable society will remain an unattainable goal. It is not possible, however, to capture the public imagination and inspire action and consent for change by over 300 million people with technical papers written by and for policy experts. In the same way that the nicely framed Lisbon Strategy and its rationale have failed to move governments to reform policies that obstruct economic growth and innovation, the SDS has thus far failed to generate bold new initiatives and social support and participation in social transformation to sustainability.

What is needed is a single, integrated development strategy that incorporates the principles of sustainability in a forward-thinking way that inspires a response among citizens and not only policy wonks. It is too early to tell but let us hope that the revised SDS will take a step in this direction.

Alexios Antypas is an associate professor at Central European University and director of CEU’s Center for Environmental Policy and Law.

It is not possible to capture the public imagination with technical papers written by and for policy experts.
According to Course for Sustainability alumnus Anita Pokrovac Patekar, Croatian environmental protection was bolstered in recent months with capacity building efforts at the Directorate for Inspection, both in its head office and in its branch units. The number of employees in the environmental sector within the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction of Croatia increased, as well.

In recent months, the European Commission officially approved a PHARE project called “Enhanced environmental inspection for enforcement of new environmental legislation.” This project will enable inspectors to better enforce new environmental legislation harmonised with EU legislation. As head of the Section for International Cooperation (pictured at left), Patekar said she was “very satisfied” to have finished the section’s work on tender documentation, and that all of these files have been posted on the Europe Aid website.

### Anita Pokrovac Patekar
**Home country:** Croatia  
**Education:** Bachelors of Science, Pharmacy  
**Job:** Head of Section for International Co-operation/ Senior Environmental Inspector  
Directorate for Inspection  
Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction of Croatia

#### Network host

As a representative of Croatian inspection, Patekar participated in the 26th plenary meeting of the European Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL) in Cardiff, Wales. Patekar described the meeting as very successful, adding that Croatian inspectors would participate in some IMPEL projects.

The Directorate of Inspection organised and hosted the first plenary meeting of the Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Network for Accession (ECENA) in Zagreb January 19-20 and also served as the event’s co-chair.

Participants came from ECENA member countries [Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the then Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo (Territory under Interim United Nations Administration)], the European Commission (DG ENV and DG ENL), the IMPEL Secretariat, the European Commission Delegation in Croatia, the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), the World Bank and the Netherlands’ Ministry of Environment. “I do really hope that all participants did take pleasant impressions of Croatia and Zagreb and would be able to return as our dear guests,” Patekar said.

**Contributed by** Ganya Hristova, Bulgaria

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**Shteryo Nozharov**

Shteryo Nozharov, an alumnus of the the first Course for Sustainability, was appointed head of the newly created Directorate of Investment Policy and Public Procurement at the Ministry of Environment and Water of Bulgaria. The directorate emerged from structural changes at the ministry.

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**Magdolna Rozs**  
(Hungary, course I)

Magdolna Rozs, a Hungarian alumnus of the first Course for Sustainability, won a Fulbright fellowship for graduate studies in the United States. She is studying environmental decision-making processes; new environmentally friendly technologies; and environmental business, policy and law.

Rozs is working on two projects there. The first is the development and electronic publication of a set of research and educational resources for the analysis and understanding of green business policies and practices in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The second is the development and publication of two special issues of the *Journal of International Wildlife Law and Policy* focusing on legal and policy issues associated with biodiversity conservation in CEE countries, especially in Hungary.