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## Article

# Sustainable Development in Poland - why it is not workable?

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**Ryszard Piasecki, Karina Kostrzewa**

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## **Sustainable Development in Poland - why it is not workable?**

### **Abstract**

*The sustainable development principle was introduced into the Polish legal system when the New Constitution was adopted in Poland in 1997. Paradoxically, in Poland - one of the few countries which have introduced the concept of SD at the level of the Constitution, it is difficult to find a reference to it in the political debate. The national sustainable development strategy Poland 2025 has met no response among society and today it seems to be hardly remembered by anybody. An average citizen does not know the concept of SD, or has a vague notion of it, often identifying it exclusively with environmental protection.*

### **1. Introduction**

According to Agenda 21 and other UN documents, sustainable development (SD) is to be seen as a wide and complex strategy not limited to pure environment protection activities. Sustainable development stands for meeting the needs of present generations without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs – in other words, a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. It offers a vision of progress that integrates immediate and longer-term objectives, local and global action, and regards social, economic and environmental issues as inseparable and interdependent components of human progress.

The concept of sustainable development comprises three interdependent pillars economy, society and environment – to meet present and future needs of human beings. Long-term sustainable development will be achievable only if

taken seriously and if implemented on a global scale. The political and public SD discourse has also been initiated in Poland, but more education and higher standards of living will be required to raise awareness among Poles in order to contribute to this global challenge. On the other hand, according to the Grossman and Krueger curve (1995), the GDP per capita in Poland is much higher than 8000 USD, the level which is perceived as the critical point for a nation to be able to decrease pollution.

However, many other empirical research results for Poland do not confirm such interdependence between the level of GDP and ecological awareness. This paper attempts to outline the present situation of public debate and institutional adjustments on sustainable development in Poland.

## **2. Institutional and economic development aspects of Poland**

Systemic and political transformation in Poland started in 1989 after the collapse of Communism. Decentralization and a free market economy were introduced, based on fundamental changes in law and the creation of new state institutions. However, a new constitution was needed to allow further changes of the country in transition aiming at the long-term development of the regions and at the welfare of the society. Continued reforms of the state, of public administration and of regional development required fundamental formal solutions accepted by the larger society. Therefore, the new Polish Constitution was approved by a national referendum in 1997.

### **2.1. Structure of the state**

According to the Constitution<sup>1</sup> which came into effect in 1997, the Republic of Poland is a democratic state ruled by law with sovereign power vested in the people.

A social market economy based on free enterprise, private property, as well as solidarity, dialogue and co-operation between social partners forms the foundation of the country's economic system. The Constitution safeguards the right of property. Expropriation may be allowed solely for public purposes and requires just compensation.

The new Constitution of the Republic of Poland provides guarantees for the decentralization of government powers to accommodate prerogatives of both central and local government while taking note of existing social, economic and

cultural bonds within the community. The inhabitants of the basic territorial units (gminas) constitute, by law, self-governing communities.

The direct consequence of fulfilling the rights guaranteed in the Constitution was the reform of public administration that was set in motion after the September 1997 parliamentary election. It aimed for a thorough decentralization in accordance with the partnership rule, in order to bring it closer to the citizens. The three parliamentary acts passed on 5 June 1998 (Act on District (poviat) self-government, Act on Voivodship (province) self-government, and Act on Voivodship Administration) usher in a new three-tier system of local administration which is made up of communes (gmina, the lowest tier, actually created in 1990 and to be incorporated into a reformed local government), districts (poviat) and provinces (voivodships), the latter accommodating the competencies of both local and central government. On 24 July the Polish Parliament adopted the act on a three-tier administrative division of the country, a decision which completed the period of foundation-laying of the new system. In October 1998, elections for the councils were held which formed the three tiers of local government. The new system was scheduled to come into effect on 1 January 1999. (1 Art.15, 16 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland from 2 April 1997 Official Journal of 16 July 1997).

The reform of the state's socio-political system is – as mentioned above – the major project implemented in Poland in the late 1990s. It was carried out according to the European Union's principle of subsidiarity by way of decentralizing the state's functions while maintaining its uniform structure, and by way of strengthening the territorial self-government, that is strengthening the communes, creating selfgoverning counties (poviats) and reducing the number of provinces (voivodships). This was accompanied by modifications to the institutional and legal rules specifying the organization and the principles for conducting regional policy at the national level. The aim was to describe with precision the institutional arrangement for conducting regional policy at the central government level (creation of a body entrusted with the design and implementation of state regional policy). Furthermore, another aim was to create, at the regional level, a public agent for regional policy by granting the provincial government the authority to conduct regional development policy, to prepare regional plans and to adapt the institutional structure of the new independent regions to conduct regional sustainable development policy and to cooperate with bodies of central government administration.

Through decentralization many responsibilities of the national state were assigned to local and regional communities. Local and regional governments are no longer subordinated to the central government and operate freely and independently, subject only to the state's legal overview. In order to secure its

role in the EU system of cooperation, decentralization allowed improving the efficiency of the state structures and determining the ability of local and regional communities to gainfully involve their initiative and skills for the successful realization of their development opportunities. The decentralization reform helped to improve the transparency and openness of public decisions via eliminating unclear and complicated administrative procedures, streamlining administrative structures and radically reforming the system of public finance – all these actions created the preconditions for effective and accountable sustainable regional development in Poland in accordance with the EU principles of subsidiarity and partnership.

## **2.2. Economic development in Poland before the EU accession**

Key EU documents published in July 1997 on the development of the European Union and the conditions governing the accession of new member states- Agenda 2000 - confirmed that Poland displayed in the 1990s the characteristics of a democracy with stable institutions guaranteeing the rule of law, respect for human rights and respect for, and the protection of, minorities. In the medium term full participation by Poland in the internal market would be possible, provided that extra efforts were made to meet the criteria of the *^acquis communautaire* in the areas of agriculture, environment and transport. However, even now, five years after joining the EU, Poland's GDP per capita still amounts to only half of the EU average.

In the 1990's the existence of a functioning market economy was noted. However, economic restructuring (especially privatization of big state-owned enterprises) and trade liberalization needed to be continued, as well as the reduction of the current account and balance of trade deficits. It should be pointed out that SMEs were already well developed, accounting for 45% of the GDP and 60% of all employees. The European Commission emphasized the need for improvements in communications, energy and transport infrastructure: roads, which are vitally important for development and trade, were in a particularly bad condition.

Shortcomings existed in particular in the fields of intellectual property rights, agricultural and regional policies, social policy, customs, justice and home affairs, telecommunications and insurance. An urgent need was the creation of a transparent legal and institutional framework for state aid. The European Commission also highlighted human resources as a field where a new form of vocational training was needed to broaden employment prospects and bring them more into line with the economic environment. There was also no

clear strategy for restructuring the steel industry and the automobile sector. Furthermore, Poland had not yet embarked on the transformation of the agricultural sector. Still, since the accession to the EU, both industrial and agricultural reforms have gradually been carried out with the help of EU structural and cohesion funds. Therefore, without mentioning literally the sustainable development concept, its idea was already being implemented in Poland together with EU regional policy. However, the aim is to achieve the EU average standard of living as soon as possible – which is to some extent contradictory to the protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations. On the other hand, it raised knowledge of effective and efficient use of work, capital, time and resources.

### **3. Sustainable development discourse in the EU and its influence in Poland**

#### **3.1. Starting point of the SD discourse in the EU**

Already in 1997, sustainable development became a fundamental objective of the EU when it was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam as an overarching objective of EU policies. At the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001, EU leaders launched the first EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) based on a proposal from the European Commission. This 2001 strategy was composed of two main parts. The first part proposed objectives and policy measures to tackle a number of key unsustainable trends, while the second part, arguably more ambitious, called for a new approach to policy-making that ensures that the EU's economic, social and environmental policies mutually reinforce each other. The central instrument developed for this purpose was the obligation for the Commission to submit each new major policy proposal to an impact assessment. The EU-SDS added a third, environmental dimension to the Lisbon Strategy of economic and social renewal so that the two strategies are complementary. The Gothenburg declaration formed the core of the EU's policies towards sustainable development. But these also encompassed other programmes and commitments, such as the commitments made at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and the Millennium Development Goals agreed in 2000, as well as global pledges to increase official development aid and to take account of the needs of developing countries in international trade.

Despite important achievements in implementing the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, unsustainable trends persist, ranging from climate change to the ageing of societies in developed countries and a widening gap between the rich and the poor in the world. The world surrounding the EU also changed significantly since 2001 with the enlargement of the European Union to 25 member states in 2004, increased instability due to terrorist threats and violence, continued globalization and changes in the world economy. The situation required a sustainable development strategy with a stronger focus, a clearer division of responsibilities, wider ownership and broader support, a stronger integration of the international dimension and more effective implementation and monitoring. After a broad public consultation, in 2005 the European Commission issued a Communication with initial stock-taking and future orientations for review. Subsequently, in June 2005 the European Council adopted a set of guiding principles for sustainable development. In December 2005 the Commission presented a proposal for a reviewed strategy and a platform for further action. The Commission's proposal built on the 2001 strategy and advocated a shift in focus to take account of progress made, to tackle shortcomings and to take account of new challenges. The result was a renewed strategy adopted by the Heads of State and Governments at the European Council of 15-16 June 2006.

### **3.2. The EU – SD strategy**

The renewed EU's Sustainable Development Strategy sets out a single, coherent strategy on how the EU will more effectively live up to its long-standing commitment to meet the challenges of sustainable development. It recognizes the need to gradually change our current unsustainable consumption and production patterns and move towards a better integrated approach to policy-making. It reaffirms the need for global solidarity and recognizes the importance of strengthening our work with partners outside the EU, including those rapidly developing countries which will have a significant impact on global sustainable development.

The overall aim of the EU-SDS is to identify and develop actions which enable the EU to achieve a continuous long-term improvement of the quality of life through the creation of sustainable communities able to manage and use resources efficiently, able to tap the ecological and social innovation potential of the economy and in the end able to ensure prosperity, environmental protection and social cohesion. The strategy outlines the overall objectives and concrete

actions for seven key priority challenges for the coming period until 2010, many of which are predominantly environmental:

- Climate change and clean energy,
- Sustainable transport,
- Sustainable consumption and production,
- Conservation and management of natural resources,
- Public health,
- Social inclusion, demography and migration,
- Global poverty and sustainable development challenges.

To improve synergies and reduce trade-offs, a more integrated approach to policy-making is proposed, based on better regulation (impact assessments) and on the guiding principles for sustainable development. The external dimension of sustainable development (e.g. global resource use, international development concerns) is factored into EU internal policy-making and through integration of SD considerations in EU's external policies.

The EU-SDS is perceived to be a strategy for the whole EU; it therefore proposes mechanisms for improving the coordination with other levels of governments and calls upon business, NGOs and citizens to become more involved in working for sustainable development. Education, research and public finance are stressed as important instruments in facilitating the transition to a more sustainable production and consumption patterns. Since monitoring and follow-up are crucial for effective implementation, the renewed strategy contains a strong governance cycle: Every two years (starting from 2007) the Commission is to produce a progress report on the implementation of the strategy. The report is to form the basis for discussion at the European Council, which will give guidance to the next steps in implementation.

However, it seems that the aims of the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy are implemented in the member states, including Poland, by other EU programmes due to their obligatory character regarding SD. Their goals are complimentary with the EU-SDS with main emphasis put on competitiveness. There are two significant EU incentives to introduce the concept of sustainable development in Poland: Firstly, the Lisbon Strategy which is to cause sustainable development through a growing competitiveness of the European economy, faster creation of new jobs and the development of advanced technologies. Secondly, it is a great challenge for Poland to absorb EU funds for the years 2007-2013 to create a sustainable environment in economy and the wider society as well as to catch up with richer EU member states.



#### **4. National Sustainable Development Strategy in Poland**

Sustainable development is included in the Polish Constitution as well as in EU treaties which makes SD a leading principle in stimulating social and economic life in Poland and in raising awareness and responsibility among Poles for our environment. SD is not only a concept of complex environment protection but above all a strategy of socio-economic development aiming at durable economic development through assuring access to scarce resources; quality of life improvement through maintaining clean environment; economic growth provided through an efficient use of energy, resources and work as well as the development of environment-friendly technologies, and the protection of the Polish cultural heritage for future generations.

However, when speaking about SD, we need to bear in mind the specific stance of Poland. In the 1990s Poland was a country still in the midst of its transformation process which meant that the SD strategy needed to cover (as it still covers) all aspects of the at the time still underdeveloped social and economic life, including environment, with very limited financial resources and newly created but as yet still unstable rules for democracy and free market. The key document establishing SD as a basic rule of our existence is contained in the newly adopted Constitution of 1997.

Art 5 states: "The Republic of Poland shall safeguard the independence and integrity of its territory and ensure the freedoms and rights of persons and citizens, the security of the citizens, safeguard the national heritage and shall ensure the protection of the natural environment pursuant to the principles of sustainable development." The article literally stipulates that SD is equally important for Poland as its national interests and the security of the country. It is intended as a thinking about responsible development of Poland. However, in practice it was not further developed as a complex integrated approach towards implementing sustainable development. Rather, it is meant to stimulate the elites to lead the social and economic development in a responsible way which would include a public debate in this field – because the fact that SD is mentioned in the Constitution does not automatically mean that there is a growing public awareness of the issue. Nevertheless, at that time it was an innovative approach even in comparison to other European countries.

When analysing the legislation on sustainable development in Poland, it becomes clear that it is in line with a responsible, integrated approach, even though its implementation seems rather coincidental, which might be due to the general public unawareness of the concept. There is also a lack of awareness

among politicians, and, in consequence, of their willingness to change the policy-making process towards an integrated, balanced social, economic and environmental development of the country. The Polish SD strategy was to a great extent influenced by the EU as a consequence of the accession negotiations. However, the first impulse had come from the Polish Parliament (as the voice of the citizens) in 1999 which in a resolution called upon the Polish executive powers to work out a SD strategy for Poland in a long-term perspective.

The strategy was entitled “Poland 2025 – Long-term strategy for sustainable development” (hereafter for short Poland 2025) and was adopted by the Council of Ministers in July 2000. All ministries concerned were consulted (within the legislation procedure), as well as NGO’s. The overall objective of the strategy is specific to Poland, namely to “ensure the growth of welfare of Polish families”. Poland 2025 focuses on closing the wealth gap with the EU but also takes other dimensions into account, such as the quality of life, a clean and natural environment and the preservation of Poland’s cultural heritage. On the economic side, the vision is to transform Poland into a knowledge society and to integrate the country fully into the EU and the global economy, including the attraction of FDI. It touches upon environmental problems and includes social and economic objectives. Sectoral policies include sustainable transport, sustainable agriculture, modernization of traditional industries (e.g. coal mining, energy generation, steel industry), the development of small and medium sized enterprises and of the service sector. Crosssectoral themes include biodiversity and ageing. Regional themes include regional development, spatial and land use harmony, and spatial social and economic coherence. Poland 2025 is a framework programme, containing a general vision that gives guidance to the development of sectoral and regional plans and policies.

These, in turn, contain detailed action plans. Thus, Poland 2025 is to be understood as an overarching strategy, one that aims at creating a structural framework and provides orientation for other national and regional strategies or plans such as the following:

- Second National Environmental Policy (from 2000)
- Strategy of Public Finances and the Economic Development in Poland (2000 - 2010)
- National Strategy of Regional Development (2000-2006)
- Concept of the Spatial Management of the Country
- National Strategy of Employment Growth and Development of Human
- Resources

- National Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological
- Diversity

Plans which contained an action programme (from 2003):

- National Strategy of Environment Protection (2000-2006)
- National Strategy of Transport Development (2000-2006)
- National Plan of Development (2004-2006)
- Polish Energy Policy up to the Year 2020
- Polish Climate Policy up to the Year 2020 (from 2003)
- Strategy of Sustainable Development of Production and Consumption
- National Development Strategy 2007-2015

All sectoral policies should support the implementation of the strategy. However, the sectoral legislation as well as local and regional strategies are not fully integrated with the goals set in Poland 2025.

In practice, most of above program strategies were elaborated in line with the EU regional policy to enable Poland to absorb the EU structural and cohesion funds. As relatively poor country, Poland has been a major recipient of structural funds assistance ever since it joined the EU in 2004. The situation raises important questions about the impact of the EU on regional policy and sustainable development strategy of Poland. The EU promoted the same trends that it claimed to have promoted in the 15 "old" member states. Therefore, the use of EU structural and cohesion funds has indeed been an important factor for Poland and has strongly influenced regional cooperation and sustainable development. However, the longerterm impact of EU regional policy on the implementation of a SD policy in Poland remains difficult to assess. Poland 2025 is based on an analysis of the changes in the economic structure since the transition to a market economy, and on the remaining problems in the economic and social fields. It structures the operational objectives into three interdependent categories: society, economy, and the state.

The society:

- **Education and training systems:** financing, management and supervision are to be changed in line with developments in the EU and globally. Spending to be increased to 6% of GDP (in 2001-2005) and to 8% (in 2020-2025).
- **Science and research:** expenditure in relation to GDP has decreased since the transformation. The objective is to reverse the trend and to increase the share of enterprises in financing RTD in order to link activities more with the needs of the economy.

- **Human resources:** in the light of demographic developments, the government will take measures to raise the level of qualifications of the workforce and to improve the functioning of the labour market in order to stimulate job creation, including in sectors related to environmental protection.
- **Health services:** since existing health-service standards are considered to be below EU-level, the government intends to increase spending as a share of GDP, with an emphasis on prophylactic measures.
- **Housing standards:** low housing investment led to high prices. The state intends to give support, in particular to first-time buyers in order to increase construction to 5 flats per 1000 inhabitants p.a. in the current decade with a further doubling in the second decade.
- **Public order:** take measures to strengthen legal order and protection and the state institutions responsible for it, incl. protection from natural disasters.

**The economy** (measures are targeted to maintain long-term growth rates):

- **Innovation:** the ability of enterprises to make use of scientific research and to implement new concepts is to be supported.
- **Development of services:** they were neglected under the old system and are thus underdeveloped. Objective to support those requiring high qualifications and certain sectors: health, environment, leisure and tourism, culture and education, which enhance quality of life.
- **Modernisation of agriculture and rural areas:** restructuring is needed to be able to integrate in the CAP, incl. production support, farm modernization, early retirement schemes and rural development programmes. The objective is to give equal opportunities to people in rural areas and in the longer term to have an active trade balance in agri-food products.
- **Foreign trade:** the deficit in the balance of trade is expected to widen after accession, but a deficit is regarded as normal for an emerging economy.
- **SMEs:** they are underdeveloped and face legal and financial restrictions. There are plans to support the SME sector.
- **Technical infrastructure:** its importance for long-term growth is stressed together with the major role of the state in planning and financing such infrastructure.

The State:

- **Spatial structure/regional development:** in the context of integration into EU regional and cohesion policy, the central government will be in charge of

coordination and general directions while voivodships will be in charge of implementation.

- **Environmental protection:** it is recognized as an important factor for the country's "stable and sustainable development". Key challenges are to continue with the recent positive trends in environmental quality, to eliminate the burdens of past pollution and to integrate the environmental dimension into the operation of other sectors.
- **Integration with EU:** while accession provides access to Community structural and R&D funding and a stronger macroeconomic framework, there will be adjustment costs, in particular in the areas of environmental protection and occupational safety where EU standards exceed Polish ones and thus Poland will face adjustment costs. Furthermore, competitive pressure will rise, in particular in traditional sectors, while the need to co-finance EU-projects will require budgetary resources. The measures listed above require substantial financial resources. At the same time, Poland 2025 envisages a reduction in the share of public spending in GDP (from 44% in 1999 to 30% in 2025). The gap is supposed to be filled by internal savings, the inflow of FDI and by EU funds, the latter going up to 4% of GDP (which is roughly equivalent to the past or current share of EU structural funds for countries like Greece or Portugal).

The implementation of Poland 2025 requires also coherence of actions at every dimension of cooperation such as:

- upwards integration – towards EU strategy: Poland 2025 was developed in 2000, and was thus adopted before the EU-SDS. Nevertheless, all EU issues have been covered in it with a different approach. The exception here is climate change, which is no priority for reasons of having achieved the target already;
- regional integration - networking provisions with other MS and joint strategies (e.g. Baltic and Nordic): close cooperation with neighbouring countries and in regional groups (e.g. Visegrad Group), but no formal liaisons were established. The cooperation was mainly limited to the exchange of information;
- downwards integration – local/regional strategies: some regional SDS and several local Agenda 21 projects were developed but do not cover the whole of Poland. As a result of a long term transformation period and EU membership, Poland can use its position in the EU to participate fully in EU internal market to speed up its development. The main economic and social development directions of the EU are outlined in the Lisbon Strategy which is to cause sustainable development through a growth of the competitiveness of the European economy, a faster creation of new jobs and the development

of advanced technologies. Moreover, a great challenge for Poland will be to use the EU funds for the years 2007-2013 to create a sustainable environment in the economy and in the society as well as to catch up with richer EU member states.

An important focal point and a distinguishing feature of the Polish approach is the role of the family, which is considered as the basis for a well functioning society.

The strategy denotes that it is important „to assure the growth of wealth of Polish families, to strengthen their material independence and their feeling of security“ (Council of Ministers 2000). Poland 2025 defines wealth as covering the material needs, but also enabling people to achieve a better life in a healthy environment. The aspect of security is conceptualised very widely: pension securities for older people, health and life protection, compliance with law, external security (assuring the sovereignty of the country) and ecological security, which includes the rational use of resources. The Poland 2025 strategy deals also with the education system, science and research and the structure of the economy: the development of the national innovation system or the modernisation of agriculture and traditional industries as well as the development of the infrastructure of energy, transport and communication. The protection of the environment is part of the spatial structure and regional development strategy. Finally, the strategy takes international agreements into account, including concepts defined in the EU framework programmes with regard to environmental protection and sustainable development of the European Union, the Agenda 21 and the Transformation Programme towards Sustainable Development of the OECD.

## **5. Attitudes towards sustainable development of politicians and society**

### **5.1. National Council on SD and other institutional actors involved**

At the executive level, the Council for Sustainable Development was established in September 2002. It is composed of representatives from administrations and civil society and chaired by the Minister of Environment, Professor Jan Szyszko. It serves as a consultative body to the Prime Minister and prepared the Poland 2025 – LongtermStrategy for Sustainable Development.

When observing the political scene in Poland with regard to sustainable development, the former and the current Ministers of Environment, Professors

Jan Szyszko and Maciej Nowicki must be mentioned. Thanks to their knowledge and activities, the concept of sustainable development was made visible in Poland, although with a much stronger impact on ecology than on its social and economic dimensions. Even now, when talking about climate change, Professor Maciej Nowicki's contributions to the public debate are obviously focused on sustainable development.

Apart from the official activities undertaken, sustainable development is not an overarching concept which would be gradually implemented by the public administration for a sectoral development of the country; rather, it serves as a general reasoning for ad hoc political ideas. There is no public debate on the issue in the Polish society.

## **5.2. Specific actors in Poland**

In Poland, there is a certain awareness of the concept of SD among NGOs and civil society organizations, but unfortunately, sustainable development is often understood primarily in ecological terms and not as a model for coherent development and sustainable consumption habits. The most active organization in the field is the Association of Sustainable Development in Poland, which was set up in 2004 by Professor Jan Szyszko. However, even in this case, the main aim of activity is the protection of the environment.

The really successful examples for the implementation of sustainable development objectives are the Polish regions: Regional/local authorities are entrepreneurs who implement both EU structural and cohesion policies as well as Agenda 21 projects focusing on sustainable regions and cities.

## **6. Conclusions**

The principle of sustainable development was introduced into the legal system of Poland when the Constitution of the Polish Republic was adopted in 1997. Paradoxically, in Poland – so far one of the few countries in the world which have introduced the concept of sustainable development at the level of the Constitution – it is difficult to find a reference to SD in the political debate. Poland 2025, the National Sustainable Development Strategy, has met with no response in the society and today hardly anybody seems to remember its existence. An average citizen does not know about the concept of sustainable development, nor does he or she have even the vaguest notion of it. Even those

who have heard of SD often identify it exclusively with environmental protection. Solving social problems (the labour market, education, health protection, gender equality, etc.) is not associated with sustainable development whatsoever, no more than the commitment to achieve the millennium development targets on the global scale. The reason for this situation might be, on the one hand, that the Ministry of the Environment is the most active organisation in this field, and, on the other hand, that there is no clear reference to sustainable development in other ministries or departments responsible for social and economic issues. One can only hope that there may be a breakthrough due to the 3 Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Zrównoważonego Rozwoju Polski, [www.ekorozwoj.pl](http://www.ekorozwoj.pl) efforts of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, which initiated the realisation of the National Programme Foresight Poland 2020 also in the research area of sustainable development of Poland. However, the “National programme for the preparation for the EU membership” and the implementation of EU legal regulations, which, particularly in recent years, have been subordinated to the concept of sustainable development, have had a much bigger impact. After joining the EU in 2004, it appeared more valuable for Poland to participate in the Lisbon Agenda which aims for competitiveness and job growth. Indeed, the implementation of certain indicators and policies which contribute to sustainable development through increasing innovation and competitiveness at the national and EU levels seems to be a more efficient approach.

All of this leads us to the conclusion that sustainable development is not only about law. It is about coherent and integrated policy-making and needs to be accepted by the larger society as a guiding principle for the many choices every citizen makes every day. This requires profound changes in thinking, in economic and social structures and in consumption and production patterns in Poland.

The most important change is to start an educational and public debate on the model of sustainable development in Poland. This requirement encompasses a wide range of activities – or, to be more precise, the whole range of activities of public authorities. The popularisation of the concept of sustainable development is necessary because, so far, it is understood only in terms of environmental protection. Of course it is important to awake the ecological awareness of the society, but it is only one part of the task. Sustainable development must be seen as a new life style which can be combined with economic growth and welfare; Poland, with its transformation background, must strive to catch up in this field. A general acquaintance in the wider society with the idea of sustainable development is necessary if the realisation of the concept is to be achieved. This precondition, however, has not as yet been met in Poland.



Therefore, it makes sense to take appropriate steps aimed at the preparation of the Polish society for unconstrained activities leading to the development of SD. In the field of social, natural and technical studies we already had considerable achievements, which, however, hardly permeate everyday practice. Removing barriers impeding this process should be considered a number one priority.

In order to enhance the social understanding and support for the idea of sustainable development, it seems necessary to take the following actions, both in terms of research and application:

- Popularisation of the concept of sustainable development among the authorities at all levels;
- Educational activity to raise awareness and support of the concept of sustainable development in the wider society, including the adaptation of educational curricula to the needs of different age groups;
- Conducting suitable macroeconomic, regional and structural policy;
- Increasing the efficiency of public institutions and better regulation;
- Development of social responsibility of businesses, popularisation of the model of balanced consumption;
- Development of advanced technologies and support for innovation;
- Building financial support and consultancy systems for businesses with view to activities contributing to sustainable development;
- Introduction of programmes supporting social development, equation of educational opportunities and the opportunities on the labour market;
- Strengthening social acceptance for the need to help the least developed countries and conducting appropriate activities in this area.

The idea of sustainable development requires that current global issues must be taken into consideration as well. Over the last two decades, globalisation processes have become much more complex and cover many more aspects of life in the world.

They also reflect global environmental problems arising, such as dwindling energy resources and climate change. Therefore, it seems that more attention must now be paid to bring about international commitments (such as the Doha Development Round or the UN post-Kyoto Protocol) in order to resolve urgent global threats rather than working on the local level. However, no-one can deny that investments in new technologies and innovation are necessary to sustain the level of development for future generations.

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## Streszczenie

### **KONCEPCJA TRWAŁEGO ROZWOJU W POLSCE - DLACZEGO OPÓŹNIA SIĘ JEJ WDROŻENIE?**

*Problematyka trwałego rozwoju (sustainable development) w krajach "starej" Unii Europejskiej nabiera coraz większego znaczenia. Chodzi o równoczesne podnoszenie poziomu ekonomicznego życia społeczeństw, bezpieczeństwo socjalne oraz ochronę środowiska naturalnego. Polska, jak jeden z pierwszych krajów europejskich, wprowadziła imperatyw trwałego rozwoju do nowej konstytucji z 1997 r. Niestety, zapis w ustawie zasadniczej nie zmienił obojętnego podejścia polityków i społeczeństwa polskiego do koncepcji trwałego rozwoju. W rzeczywistości w Polsce nie toczy się żadna debata publiczna na powyższy temat. Wydaje się, że relatywnie ciągle jeszcze niski poziom gospodarczy i cywilizacyjny naszego społeczeństwa nie sprzyja podejmowaniu rzetelnej dyskusji i działań w kierunku zagwarantowania w Polsce trwałego rozwoju uwzględniającego czynniki ekonomiczne, społeczne i ekologiczne.*