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Sustainable development in Ukraine: the role of internal and external actors in the policy-making process¹

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Abstract: While in theory sustainable development has been included in policy-on-paper, policy-in-practice tends to be difficult. In this context, the author discusses the role that internal and external actors have played with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development into Ukrainian national policies, and analyses the extent to which the government of Ukraine and the European Union have been able and/or willing to contribute to this process.

Keywords: *sustainable development, Ukraine, European Union, stakeholders involvement, policy for sustainable development*

1. Introduction

In the years that have passed since the Club of Rome published the report *Limits to growth* in 1972, the issue of sustainable development has steadily increased in importance on the agendas of both national, and international actors². As evidenced by the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development that was held in Johannesburg in 2002, the need to incorporate sustainable development into the policies of national governments and international

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² For the purpose of this paper, sustainable development is defined in line with the definition that was given in the report *Our common world* – namely as development that fulfils the needs of the present generation without endangering the ability of future generations to fulfil their needs (*Our Common World*, 1987). More specifically, sustainable development is taken to be composed of three dimensions – the so-called triple bottom line: economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

organisations is by now widely recognised (Hens and Nath, 2005)³.

However, this is not to say that the transition from the phase of policy-on-paper into that of policy-in-practice has necessarily been an easy one. On the contrary, many national and international actors have so far been either unwilling or unable (or both!) to take into consideration in the design and implementation of their policies the long-term social and environmental consequences that come with the pursuit of short-term economic growth.

Judged by its current track record in the field of sustainability, Ukraine seems to be no exception to this rule (Vovk, 2003a). While this may not come as a surprise, it does give rise to a number of serious concerns. Given the fact that in April 1986 the country witnessed the worst nuclear accident the world had ever seen, one might expect the issue of sustainable development to be more pressing in Ukraine than anywhere else. What is more, in view of the high degree of involvement from international organisations with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development into Ukrainian national policies, one might expect the translation from words into deeds to have proceeded more smoothly.

When combining Ukraine's own apparent need to move from the phase of policy-on-paper into that of policy-in-practice with the influence that is supposedly wielded by others and setting that against the country's poor track record in the field of sustainability, the question that presents itself is the following: what is the role that internal and external actors have played with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development into Ukrainian national policies? More specifically, this paper seeks to analyse the extent to which the government of Ukraine and the European Union (EU) have been able and/or willing to contribute to this process.

2. Sustainable development in Ukraine: historical overview

When analysing the role that internal and external actors have played in the Ukrainian policy-making process with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development, it is

³ For the purpose of this paper the incorporation of sustainable development into the policies of national governments and international organisations is taken to imply (1) the design and implementation of policies devoted specifically to this issue; and/or (2) the design and implementation of policies that take into account the various dimensions of which sustainable development is composed – *e.g.* policies concerning the pursuit of economic growth that take social and environmental consequences into consideration.

necessary to first define the point of departure for the government of Ukraine and the EU, as well as the historical legacy with which they were confronted. Hence, this section presents an overview of the way in which the issue of sustainable development was dealt with when Ukraine – or to be more precise, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR) – was still a part of the Soviet Union.

Concerning Ukraine's historical legacy, the prevailing situation in the field of sustainability was not a promising one (Kravchenko, 1996; Nazarov, Cook and Woodgate, 2001). While this held true for many (if not all) of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union, the circumstances in which the UkrSSR found itself were of a particular nature. As one of the most important parts of the Soviet empire in terms of economic potential, it played a central role in the communist drive for rapid and large-scale industrialisation (Subtelny, 1994).

At first sight, it may seem as though this relentless quest for unlimited growth wielded some positive results. By way of an example: thanks in no small part to the UkrSSR the Soviet Union – whose economy was 8 times smaller than that of the United States – was able to produce up to 15 times more steel than its Cold War enemy (Vovk, 2003b). What is more, in terms of the quantity of its output the capacity of the Soviet military-industrial complex was unparalleled with the Ukrainian city of Dnipropetrovsk being home to the largest missile factory in the world (De Deugd, 2005).

However, upon a more thorough inspection it is clear that the Soviet Union's chosen path of development produced a whole series of negative consequences. Concerning the social side-effects that came with the pursuit of economic growth, the communist preference for heavy industry over light industry and the accompanying neglect of the production of consumer goods meant that the standard of living of Soviet citizens was lagging behind that of their American counterparts (Subtelny, 1994). Concerning the environmental consequences, Vovk (2003b) explains that in the Soviet Union the environment was regarded not so much as a resource in need of protection, but rather as a commodity that could be depleted at will in order to keep the process of industrialisation on track and on speed.

With the long-term costs that resulted from the failure to stimulate social development and environmental protection thus subjugated to the short-term benefits that were the outcome of the pursuit of unlimited economic growth, the issue of sustainable development did not rank highly on the agenda of the UkrSSR. Also, while there were some dissidents who expressed

concern with regard to the ability of the communist system to sustain the present way of life (let alone a better one!) for future generations, their voice was not heard in the totalitarian state that was the Soviet Union⁴.

In fact, it was not until the events of 26th April 1986 that the incorporation of sustainable development into the policies of the UkrSSR was seriously contemplated. Following the explosion of reactor no. 4 at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, the Soviet leadership designed and implemented a series of measures in an attempt to deal with the aftermath of this catastrophe of unprecedented proportions (Vovk, 2003b). What is more, with Mikhail Gorbachev at the helm in Moscow, the UkrSSR in 1987 witnessed the introduction of so-called *eco-glasnost* – or openness in the field of environmental affairs (Vovk, 2003b).

What *eco-glasnost* entailed was the de-classification of information concerning the Chornobyl disaster, as well as of information concerning the state of the Ukrainian environment more generally (*i.e.* news about polluted rivers, poisoned soil, foul air, etc.). In other words, in the late 1980's it was gradually becoming known to the Ukrainian public just how serious the environmental consequences were that had come with the communist drive for rapid and large-scale industrialisation (Subtelny, 1994).

As knowledge of not only the environmental, but also the social side-effects of Soviet-style development grew, so too did anger and concern become more widespread. In turn, this resulted in a steady increase in the number of dissidents who were active in the field of sustainability.⁵ In 1987 these dissidents came together to form the so-called *Zelenyi Svit* or Green World movement; an umbrella organisation that united several hundred Ukrainian dissident groups (Vovk, 2003b).

Together with dissident movements that addressed – among other issues – the growing distrust of Soviet leadership, the repeated calls for reforms that would go beyond the scope of *perestroika* and *glasnost* and the rising tensions over the future institutional framework of the Soviet Union, the Green World movement eventually decided to make its influence felt in politics, as well as in society.

In so doing, the Green World movement was initially quite successful. The few political parties that emerged on the Ukrainian political scene in the late 1980's took the concerns that

⁴ An example of the work of Soviet dissidents in the field of sustainability can be found in Komarov (1981).

⁵ See for example the establishment of the Soviet dissident magazine *Glasnost*; a magazine devoted to testing the limits of *glasnost* by focusing – among other issues – on the environment.

were raised by the dissident groups to heart and managed to get the parliament of the UkrSSR to declare the entire territory of the republic an “environmental disaster area” (Vovk, 2003b). What is more, the Green World movement played a role in the all-encompassing dissident movement *Rukh*; the movement that was instrumental in the adoption of the declaration of sovereignty in July 1990 and the adoption of the declaration of independence in August 1991 (Subtelny, 1994).

In this sense, it can be argued that in the final stages of the existence of the UkrSSR sustainable development not only became incorporated into Ukrainian policies, but was also instrumental in shaping Ukrainian politics. For, as Vovk (2003b) explains, the increasing importance of the issue of sustainable development on the agendas of both the Soviet leadership and the Ukrainian dissident movement contributed to the implosion of the UkrSSR and to the emergence of Ukraine as an independent actor on the international stage.

3. Sustainable development in Ukraine: the role of the national government

With the starting point for the involvement of internal and external actors in the incorporation of sustainable development into Ukrainian national policies thus described, this paper now proceeds with an analysis of the extent to which the government of Ukraine has been able and/or willing to make the transition from the phase of policy-on-paper into that of policy-in-practice.

As has already been explained in the previous section, this transition was slowly starting to take shape in the years leading up to the adoption of the Ukrainian declaration of independence. However, once independent statehood had been achieved, this process was not accelerated (Vovk, 2003a). On the contrary, in the period of almost 16 years that has passed since the eventful summer of 1991, Ukraine can boast of only a minor number of tangible results in the field of sustainability (*National...*, 2002; United Nations, 2002; Ministry of Environmental Protection of Ukraine, 2004).

When it comes to explaining this phenomenon, there are several factors that should be taken into account. To begin with, the Green World movement experienced severe difficulties in completing the transformation from an umbrella organisation into a fully-fledged political party. In a country with no democratic tradition to speak of, the establishment of a multi-party political

system in the European sense remained confined to those factions that emerged as the successors to the communist party and that could profit from the latter's support base, organisational infrastructure and financial resources (Nahaylo, 1999).

Thus, whereas the Green World movement had been instrumental in the implosion of the UkrSSR, it did not manage to play a role of any significance in the development of the independent Ukrainian state that succeeded it. In the early 1990's the Green World movement fell apart into the multitude of groups of which it had originally been composed – a fate that also befell *Rukh*, the all-encompassing dissident movement of which the Green World movement had been a constituent element (Nahaylo, 1999).

As a consequence of the inability of the former dissidents to maintain a unified stance amidst the turmoil that was characteristic of Ukraine's attempts to establish a democratic political system, the country's government came to be composed of members of the old communist *nomenclature*. The backgrounds and careers of the two presidents who were in office prior to the outbreak of the 2005 Orange Revolution – Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994) and Leonid Kuchma (1994-2004) – testify to this (De Deugd, 2005).

Given the fact that the government of the independent Ukrainian state was composed of the same people who had also made up the leadership of the UkrSSR, the argument can be brought to the fore that the Soviet way of thinking about the subjugation of long-term social and environmental costs to short-term economic benefits prevailed as well. What is more, it can be argued that it was because of the continued dominance of the old communist *nomenclature* that the issue of sustainable development did not rank more highly on the national agenda.

However, this approach is too one-sided. Irrespective of the willingness (or rather: the unwillingness) of the government of Ukraine to translate words into deeds with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development into national policies, there is also the question of (in)ability. What should not be forgotten is that Ukraine – like so many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe that had previously been a part of the Soviet empire – was presented with a multitude of challenges.

Among these, the country's poor track record in the field of economic transformation was of special significance. For, even though Ukraine was initially regarded as one of the former Soviet republics with the greatest potential to successfully transform into a free and functioning market economy (ironically enough thanks to its history of rapid and large-scale industrialisation

and its economic potential in terms of output capacity), these predictions turned out to be much too optimistic.

On the positive side, there were efforts to attract foreign investments and loans from international financial institutions, as well as efforts to design and implement policies with regard to privatisation, liberalisation and restructuring (Nahaylo, 1999). On the negative side, the decisions to cut subsidies for a variety of industrial goods and to raise the prices of foodstuffs and public transport, led to a deterioration in the general standard of living (Iradian, 2007; Nahaylo, 1999). In combination with falling production, a growing shadow economy, a sharp rise in corruption, rising levels of unemployment and an increasing rate of inflation, this resulted in a situation in which Ukraine remained far removed from its goal of being awarded the status of “market economy” (Hare et al., 1998; Iradian, 2007).

While the need for the various Ukrainian governments that have been in power since the adoption of the declaration of independence to overcome the country’s legacy of Soviet-style economic development represented a challenge in itself, it also gave rise to a number of serious concerns with regard to the question of how to find a balance between economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

More likely than not, in a country that was struggling (and often failing!) to reach the level of development that had been attained in the final years of the existence of the UkrSSR, the pursuit of as high a level of economic growth as possible was a goal of overarching importance, irrespective of the consequences. In other words, the argument that can be brought to the fore is that in Ukraine the pursuit of short-term economic growth took precedence over the curtailing of social and environmental costs, even if the latter might be so high as to endanger the former in the long run.

In turn, following this line of reasoning helps to explain why in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, when the members of the old communist *nomenclature* lost their seats to Victor Yushenko and his allies, the issue of sustainable development did not significantly increase in importance on the agenda of the government of Ukraine⁶. As the country’s third president, Yushenko – like his predecessors – was faced with a multitude of problems, many of which required immediate and short-term responses, there was little room left for the more

⁶ Here, it is of significance to note that the issue of sustainable development was all but absent from the political programme with which Yushenko entered the 2004 presidential elections.

persistent and long-term question of sustainable development.

Together with the unwillingness that came with the country's only partly successful process of political transformation, the inability to move from the phase of policy-on-paper into that of policy-in-practice that was the result of Ukraine's unfinished process of economic transformation, resulted in a situation in which the issue of sustainable development decreased in importance on the agenda after reaching its peak in the period surrounding the emergence of Ukraine as an independent actor on the international stage. In other words, the momentum that had been created by the Chornobyl disaster in the late 1980's evaporated rather quickly from the early 1990's onwards.

4. Sustainable development in Ukraine: the role of the European Union

The question that follows from the above account of the way in which Ukraine's own government has played its role in the country's policy-making process with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development, is to what extent have external actors been able and/or willing to make a contribution to this. Thus, this section is devoted to an analysis of the role that has been played by the EU.

Over the course of the 1990's Ukraine came to the conclusion that cooperation with – and possibly integration into – the EU was an important goal of its foreign and security policy. What is more, following the outbreak of the Orange Revolution and the subsequent election of Yushenko as Head of State, this goal became priority no. 1 with the president repeatedly stating Ukraine's credentials as a European country and expressing his desire to be allowed to advance more quickly along the road towards Brussels⁷.

However, from the point of view of the EU, membership is not an option that is open to Ukraine, at least not in the foreseeable future (EurActive, 2007). To the EU, Ukraine is only a neighbour; an important neighbour with whom it is necessary to establish close ties, but a neighbour nonetheless. As such, Ukraine is placed in the same category as the other former Soviet republics Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova and the Mediterranean

⁷ An example of this can be found in the article 'Realistic Kyiv', which was issued by the presidential press office as recently as 15 March 2007 and which was published in *The Wall Street Journal* as an opinion article.

countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority (Commission of the European Communities, 2004).

In an attempt to develop its relations with this rather diverse group of countries in a meaningful way, in 2003 the EU designed the so-called European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (Commission of the European Communities, 2003). The purpose of the ENP – which was implemented immediately after the conclusion of the 2004 round of enlargement that saw the inclusion of eight countries from Central and Eastern Europe that had previously been a part of the Soviet empire – was “to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the new borders of the Union” (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 4). More specifically, the ENP sought to “develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood – a ‘ring of friends’ – with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations” (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 4).

Among the issues that the EU deemed to be of special significance to its new neighbourhood was that of sustainable development (Commission of the European Communities, 2004). Through the ENP the EU hoped to encourage countries like Ukraine to design and implement a policy of sustainable economic growth that would take potentially negative social and environmental consequences into consideration. In other words, through the ENP the EU wanted its neighbours to develop a good track record in the field of sustainability.

With the issue of sustainable development thus ranking rather highly on the agenda of the ENP, one might expect it to be one of the EU’s more long-standing goals. However, that is not the case: the fact that the EU sought to become so involved with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development into Ukrainian (or Armenian, Algerian, etc.) national policies is a relatively recent phenomenon that dates back only to the turn of the century.

At a summit of the European Council that was held in Goteborg in 2001, the Heads of State and Government of the EU member states adopted their first-ever strategy in the field of sustainability: *A sustainable Europe for a better world: a European strategy for sustainable development*. In this strategy, the EU emphasised the need to find a balance between economic growth, social development and environmental protection (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). To this end, the EU called upon its own institutions, as well as its member states, to take sustainable development into account in the future design and implementation of each and every policy (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). In other words, during

the Goteborg summit the EU called for the incorporation of sustainable development into its internal policy-making process.

With regard to the functioning of the EU outside of its own territory, in 2002 the European Commission adopted the declaration *Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*. Through this declaration, the EU underscored the belief that the incorporation of sustainable development into the policies of national governments and international organisations was a goal that should be achieved on a global scale. As a first step towards meeting that goal, the EU called upon its institutions and member states to take the three dimensions of which sustainable development is composed – economic growth, social development and environmental protection – into consideration in their relations with third parties (Commission of the European Communities, 2002).

As an overarching framework for the establishment of relations with the EU's neighbours on its eastern, southern and south-eastern borders, the ENP was clearly in line with the new directives from Brussels concerning the need to become actively involved in the field of sustainability. In this sense at least, the ENP seemed to be an improvement when compared to its predecessors. Previously, in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and the Common Strategies that were concluded with those former Soviet republics that, like Ukraine, were not included in the EU's 2004 round of enlargement, specific concerns in the field of sustainability had been subordinated to more general problems in the sphere of political and economic transformation (*Partnership...*, 1994; European Council, 1999)⁸.

However, upon a more thorough inspection the ENP also turned out to have a number of serious drawbacks. In the case of Ukraine and the incorporation of sustainable development into the country's national policies, these drawbacks became visible within the so-called Action Plan – the document that, within the broader framework that was provided by the ENP, contained the guidelines for cooperation between the EU and an individual neighbouring country (European Commission, 2005).

⁸ Both in the EU/Ukraine Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, and in the EU/Ukraine Common Strategy, sustainable development was not included as an issue in its own right (European Commission, 2005). Also, even though the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the Common Strategy did pay attention to the various dimensions of which sustainable development is composed, the fact that other concerns were considered to be of greater importance implied that they were rather ineffectual instruments in terms of overcoming the difficulties mentioned in the previous section regarding the unwillingness and inability of the Ukrainian national government to prioritise long-term social and environmental costs over short-term economic benefits.

While it is outside the scope of this paper to give a detailed account of the problems that beset the *EU/Ukraine Action Plan*, it should be noted that the ENP is essentially demand-driven. Even though the EU can make use of the ENP to outline the issues with regard to which it deems cooperation to be the most fruitful and success to be the most likely, in any such action plan the EU is restricted to including only those issues that are agreed upon by the appropriate neighbouring country (Commission of the European Communities, 2004). In other words, the Action Plan that was concluded between the EU and Ukraine was tailored more to the demands of the latter than to those of the former.

As a consequence of this approach, the issue of sustainable development did not rank highly among the areas of cooperation that were outlined in the *EU/Ukraine Action Plan*. Even though the incorporation of sustainable development into the country's national policies was defined as one of the most important goals of the ENP, the action plan that was concluded between the two sides paid relatively little attention to the design and implementation of policies that took the various dimensions of which sustainable development is composed into consideration (European Commission, 2005). Again, as had been the case with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the Common Strategy, other issues prevailed.

Thus, even though on paper the issue of sustainable development was increasing in importance on the agenda of both the EU and Ukraine, this was not being matched by actual results (European Commission, 2006). In this sense, it can be argued that the demand-driven approach of the ENP was a flawed one. However, there might also be another reason that should be taken into account when analysing the difficulties that the EU encountered in trying to make a meaningful contribution to the Ukrainian policy-making process.

This reason has to do with the perspective of membership – or rather, the lack thereof – that the EU was offering to Ukraine through the ENP. As has already been explained, the EU was not interested in Ukraine as a potential member state. On the contrary, even though the EU recognised Ukraine's credentials as a European country, it stopped short of recognising it as a potential candidate member state and instead treated Ukraine as its eternal neighbour (Lobjakas, 2005).

However, from the point of view of president Yushenko and the people who came to power in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, the proverbial beacon of EU membership – however distant – was important in terms of securing domestic support for the implementation of

the often painful reforms that were needed in order for their country to successfully complete its processes of political and economic transformation (*The European Union's New...*, 2005). In turn, it can be argued that this also implied that without the option of membership available to it, it would be difficult for the government of Ukraine to overcome the many hurdles that hampered the incorporation of sustainable development into the country's national policies.

What is more, while the lack of any perspective of EU membership made it difficult for the government of Ukraine to play a role in the country's policy-making process with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development, it also made it difficult for the EU to contribute to this as an external actor. As such, the situation in which the EU found itself differed sharply from that leading up to the last two rounds of enlargement, when it could either use the carrot of inclusion or the stick of exclusion to induce candidate member states to live up to the conditions for membership (Nugent, 2004). However, with the ENP designed and implemented the way it is, the EU is simply lacking the means to either enforce or entice "a mere neighbour" like Ukraine to do its bidding – something to which the first tentative results of the Action Plan testify (European Commission, 2006).

Thus, the fact that the EU was struggling to become a player in the field of sustainability, resulted in a situation in which the issue of sustainable development – an issue that was of special significance to the EU – did not increase in importance on the agenda in practical terms, in spite of the emphasis that had been placed upon it in declaratory terms. In other words, in an interesting parallel with the previous section concerning the momentum that had been created by the Chernobyl disaster, the momentum that had been created by the introduction of the ENP withered away quite quickly.

5. Concluding remarks

When seeking to analyse the extent to which the government of Ukraine on the one hand and the EU on the other hand have been able and/or willing to contribute to the transition from the phase of policy-on-paper into that of policy-in-practice with regard to the issue of sustainable development, the outcome is a rather negative one, albeit for different reasons.

When looking at the role that internal actors have played in Ukraine's policy-making

process, it seems clear that the continued presence of members of the old communist *nomenclature* made it difficult to muster sufficient political will to improve the country's track record in the field of sustainability. However, the fact that the various Ukrainian governments that have been in office since the adoption of the declaration of independence in 1991 were faced with a multitude of problems in the sphere of political and economic transformation implies that the failure to increase the importance of the issue of sustainable development on the national agenda was not only a matter of unwillingness, but also of inability.

When looking at the role that external actors have played in Ukraine's policy-making process, the question of inability should be taken into consideration as well. In spite of the EU's intentions, the reality of the ENP was such that it did not have the necessary means to contribute in any significant way to the design and implementation of policies that would take the long-term social and environmental consequences that come with the pursuit of short-term economic growth into account. However, in view of the fact that the EU was itself struggling to translate words into deeds with regard to the implementation of the various strategies that it had designed in order to include sustainable development into its internal, as well as its external policies, concerns about whether the EU mustered sufficient political will might be brought to the fore.

All in all, the answer to this paper's guiding question – what is the role that internal and external actors have played with regard to the incorporation of sustainable development into Ukrainian national policies? – should be that both the government of Ukraine and the EU have allowed a mixture of unwillingness and inability to prevent them from increasing the importance of the issue of sustainable development on the agenda. The consequences of this for possible future developments in Ukraine in the field of sustainability are as yet unknown. However, what is known is that – with reference to Al Gore's Academy Award winning documentary – the truth as it stands today is an inconvenient one.

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Zrównoważony rozwój na Ukrainie: rola wewnętrznych i zewnętrznych podmiotów w procesie formułowania zasad polityki

Streszczenie

O ile z teoretycznego punktu widzenia zrównoważony rozwój został ujęty w dokumentach politycznych, o tyle w praktyce same działania polityczne wydają się sprawiać pewne trudności. W tym kontekście autor omawia znaczenie wewnętrznych oraz zewnętrznych podmiotów w odniesieniu do wdrażania zasad zrównoważonego rozwoju do ukraińskiej polityki krajowej, a także analizuje, do jakiego stopnia rząd Ukrainy oraz Unia Europejska są w stanie oraz w gotowości do wspierania tego procesu.

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, Ukraina, Unia Europejska, zaangażowanie interesariuszy polityka na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju