

Twenty-five years on

Progressing the sustainable development and environmental agenda in the EU and the role of the EEAC network

David Baldock



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The Network

The European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC) is a network of advisory bodies established by national or regional governments. EEAC members offer independent advice to their respective national or regional governments and parliaments related to the environment and sustainable development.

The conference

The 25th EEAC Annual Conference 'Towards the 2030 Agenda and beyond: European cooperation within a new citizens–science–policy interface' was held on 12 and 13 October 2017 in Maastricht, the Netherlands. Like many other organizations, the EEAC network is challenged by the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the present political and societal atmosphere, and the changing interface between science, policy and society. Citizens are claiming their voice, and are no longer taking established facts and institutions for granted. The conference offered renewed inspiration for European cooperation that goes beyond borders, silos and institutional barriers. The conference was dedicated to these needs.

Co-organising Councils

The EEAC organised the conference together with the Dutch Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli), the Flemish Environment and Nature Council, (Minaraad), the Belgian Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FRDO CFDD) and the National Council for Sustainable Development (CSDD) of Luxembourg.

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1. Introduction

By any measure, the EU is at the forefront of both thinking and action on the environmental and sustainable development agenda and has actively built this position over the last quarter century, indeed beginning earlier, in the 1970s. The panoply of EU environmental law and the governance systems that surround it have become one of the most comprehensive and sophisticated in the world. This is a significant achievement and a moment of celebration would not be out of place, especially at the EEAC's birthday party. However, few would argue that there is cause for complacency or that continued momentum is assured.

On all fronts there is further to go, as we are reminded by the UN's 2030 agenda, the challenge of meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the growing acceptance of planetary boundaries, the slow pace of action on climate change mitigation, and the persistence of poverty, malnutrition and unemployment. The last quarter century, reviewed in this paper, represents only a first segment of what will be a much longer process.

The purpose here is a review of the period since 1992, reflecting on some of the major themes, concepts, drivers and constraints, and the players involved. Most visible amongst those players are of course the European institutions, national and regional governments, NGOs and lobbies. Of special interest here, however, is an informal network first established in 1993: the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC). The EEAC brings together a group of councils and their counterparts that have been established formally by national or regional governments to advise them, and often parliaments as well, on environmental and broader sustainable development issues.

The member councils vary in form and mandate. Some are composed exclusively of scientists, often natural scientists but including other disciplines as well. They base their advice largely on scientific evidence and arguments. A larger group consists of more representative bodies bringing together a range of stakeholders, often comprising environmental NGOs, business and trade union representatives, experts, and sometimes governmental agencies. Councils vary considerably in the weighting given to these different groups within their membership. All are established by national or regional governments and offer independent advice to their governments and/or parliaments.

Such bodies can be created, reformed and abolished relatively frequently, as has occurred in several countries in recent years. This flux is reflected in the history of the network, as represented in Appendix I and summarised in the figure on p.5. The figure shows a considerable period of growth, followed by some years of contraction and then, more recently, revival. There are currently fourteen members of the network and there are others interested in joining

The role of the network and its contribution to the dialogue in Europe is interspersed in this paper within a broader account of policy and broader political developments in the EU, looking particularly at themes on which the network has been active. Text boxes provide some detail on the work of the network, such as key conferences, working groups, publications and other events.

International & EU policy achievements in relation to EEAC activities

Sources: see Appendix I, p.35

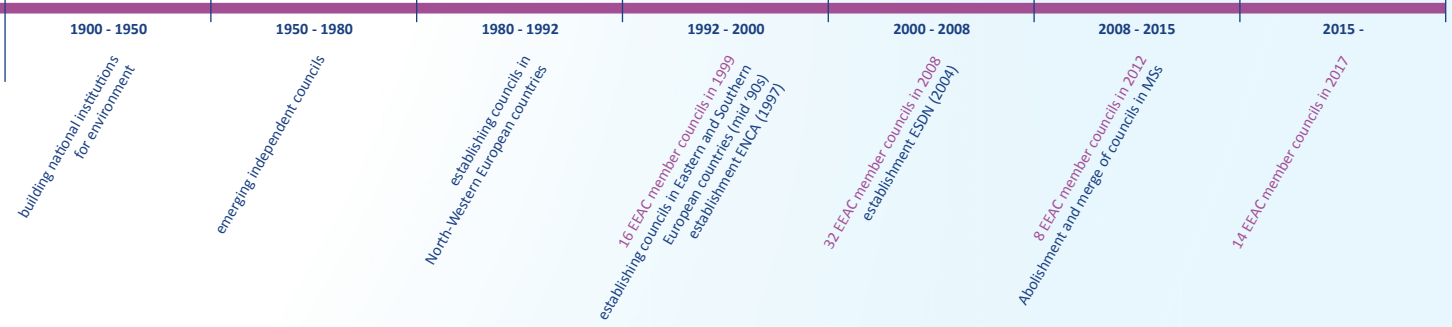
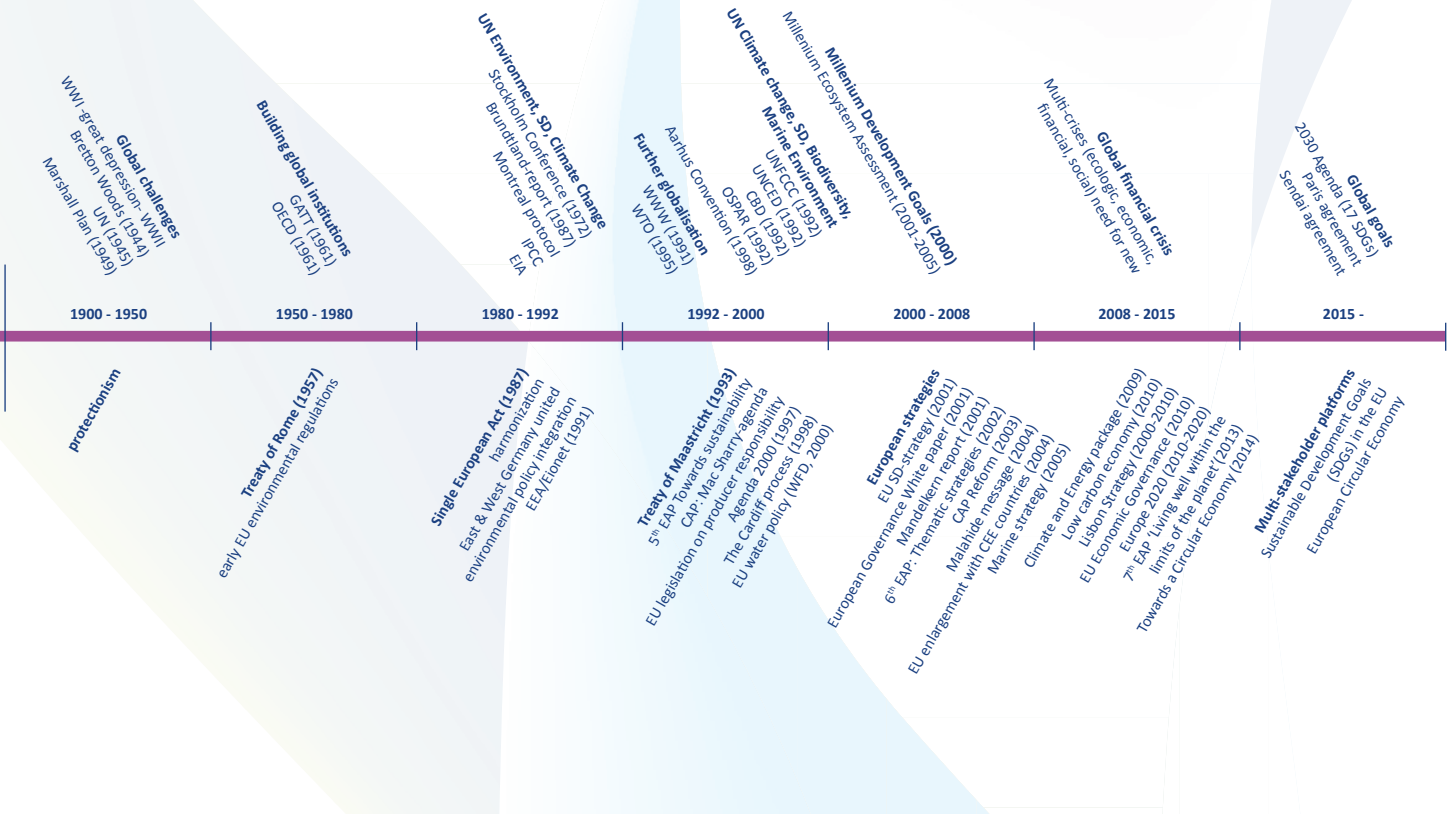
International

Europe

Concepts & principles

EEAC-network

Councils/networks



In looking back at the history of the sustainable development and environment agenda in Europe and the EU in particular, some of the main currents can be represented by milestones such as the adoption of new laws, policies and strategies and a handful of prominent conferences. It is more difficult to capture changes in social attitudes and behaviour, the building of new relationships, the evolving sense of what the future should look like, the changing understanding of the threats to sustainability, and the roles of different actors in addressing them. It is also challenging to pin down the more profound shifts in public and political discourse and the pattern of issues commanding attention. Progress depends on change at these levels as well as in the governmental process (Owen, 2015; Haigh, 2016).

Box 1: Engaging in the network, one example from many

Illustrative of the flux in the network is the story of the Irish sustainable development council Comhar and its involvement in the EEAC, as well as the companion network, ESDN. Originally established in 1999 as the National Sustainable Development Partnership, Comhar became an important intermediary for Local Agenda 21 activities. It was also involved in the international agenda for sustainable development. Comhar was an active member of the EEAC network from 2003 to 2010, contributing to both the Sustainable Development and the Biodiversity Working Groups (WGs).

In 2012, Comhar's role was brought within the remit of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), which subsequently has advised on sustainable economic, social and environmental development in Ireland. NESC is a member of the EEAC, but its involvement is less intensive than previously. Comhar, led by Noel Casserly, played a leading role in stimulating a learning process that brought together councils in the network with public administrators involved in furthering the sustainable development approach within the EU. This was exemplified by the Kinsale conference on sustainable development held during the Irish EU Presidency in 2004. The conference provided input for the European Sustainable Development Strategy and the related Lisbon process, notably via the recommendations of the concluding 'Kinsale Challenge'.

The Kinsale conference also provided a stimulus for the emergence of a new network of public bodies and administrators in charge of national sustainable development strategy processes in EU Member States, which became the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN). Some members of the EEAC network – bodies more closely linked to their own government – made the choice to join ESDN, and leave the EEAC network. So two related and complementary networks have evolved, enjoying a good relationship and continuing to exchange experience and knowledge.

EEAC members have sought to contribute to several different layers of transition in their own societies, the development of a new understanding and approach, and a more active and informed level of networking and participation. They look towards change in both formal institutions and ultimately social attitudes, business decisions and personal lifestyles. As a group they have organised themselves to engage collectively at the EU and wider level as well.

They have strived, like many others, to build a European network both to inform and support one another and to bring a distinctive voice to the vortex of EU policy (Macrory and Niestroy, 2004; De Vries, 2015). Box 1 illustrates the engagement and impact of one of the EEAC members.

This paper does not attempt a studied history, still less an evaluation of this engagement, but it does try to capture some of the main themes and the ways in which they were addressed by the EEAC against a background of EU developments. Inevitably it is selective and highly incomplete. Most of the EEAC's activities are conducted by Working Groups covering particular themes and this structure is broadly, but not precisely, reflected in the sections below, following a short reprise of the point of departure in 1992/1993.

2. Starting points

Four decades ago, it was far from evident that environmental law and policy would develop primarily at the European rather than the national level, or that the future EU would overtake the US as the prime mover in the Western world in pursuing international co-operation and setting standards. The European Community's roots in the European Coal and Steel Community and the Common Market were still prominent, and the Treaty of Rome made no mention of the environment, referring rather to "continuous and balanced expansion".

By the early 1990s, this had changed. Environmental policy had become relevant to the (now) EU for a variety of reasons, two of the most powerful being the need to create relatively similar regulatory standards for industry in the expanding common market, and to take up elements of a growing environmental agenda. This agenda had both a significant cross-boundary dimension and a political appeal in several quarters, including the European Parliament.

Many early measures from the 1970s onwards were concerned with pollution control and the creation of common standards, generally based on Article 100 of the Treaty. This authorised the then European Community to act to harmonise legal and administrative provisions in the Member States that had direct consequences for the establishment or the functioning of the Common Market. Unwanted barriers to trade therefore could be avoided, as could over-reliance on standards developed in any particular country, Germany being the most likely actor in many fields. One of several important exceptions to this approach was the Birds Directive, which was adopted in April 1979 and created a precedent for EU involvement in nature protection and land use issues at a relatively high level of detail.

Treaty changes in due course provided stronger legal legitimisation for establishing environmental legislation separately from economic concerns in the EU. The Single European Act, which came into force in 1987, contained a Title on Community environmental policy with rather broad objectives to permit a considerably wider range of legal initiatives than previously. This was reinforced by a new principle that "environmental protection requirements shall be a component of the Community's other policies".

The flow of new Community measures increased in the 1980s, comprising a mix of regulations, directives and decisions. It built on a 1976 directive controlling emissions of dangerous substances to water, and included a broadly parallel directive on emissions from industrial plants in 1984, and a 1988 directive limiting sulphur dioxide and other pollutants from large combustion plants in order to control acid rain. The influential Drinking Water Directive was agreed in 1980, although the cross-border dimension was much more limited. The major Urban Waste Water Directive was agreed in 1991 (the Water Framework Directive not until 2000) and the Habitats Directive in 1992. The EU Ecolabel scheme and the LIFE funding instrument to support projects in the Member States both date from 1992.

Many of the new generation of measures set down minimum environmental standards for Member States to meet. After the Treaty change, a range of legislation concerned with harmonising standards and processes within the Community could be agreed by a qualified majority in council. With the support of several environmentally progressive governments, this led to the adoption of a stronger environmental dimension in Community market measures, and a more active debate on the balance between economic and broader environmental protection objectives. Generally, this legislation allowed Member States to set higher national standards than those required by Community legislation if they wished, subject to certain limitations. The interplay between national and Community measures became more complex, much more so than sometimes is depicted in populist pastiches of the EU as an entirely top-down monolith.

The dynamic between different governance levels on the environment has grown more sophisticated over time, and this has opened up the field for advisory councils to engage in beyond purely domestic concerns. Indeed, it became difficult for councils to address a range of national or regional issues without encountering a European dimension and engagement in EU questions was bound to grow, whatever form it took.

Within the EU, the Maastricht Treaty had come into force in 1993 and included for the first time a reference to sustainable development amongst the formal tasks of the EU, albeit in an awkward phrasing. It was a different Europe to now, with a newly reunited Germany and changing relationships in Central and Eastern European countries. There were fewer and less diverse Member States, a less powerful European Parliament, greater confidence about economic expansion, and a much more optimistic outlook about driving change within Europe.

The drive to a more sustainable model of development in Europe was the inspiration for the EU's fifth Action Programme on the Environment. As a forward plan running to the year 2000 it was the most ambitious Programme of its kind to date in several respects, advocating the integration of environmental policy in five key sectors: agriculture, energy, industry, tourism and transport as a key step towards sustainable development. The plan was not to proceed via regulation, but rather to "achieve full integration of environmental and other relevant policies through the active participation of all the main actors in society". There was a call for a substantially bottom-up approach to influence the attitudes and behaviour of actors in the non-environmental sectors. This was no small task, given that the climate debate had scarcely begun and the 'greening' of agriculture was still at a very early stage. Mechanisms to share knowledge, such as the EEA / Eionet, were in place but relatively young. The European Environment Agency was not operational until 1994.

Finally, by June 1990, the Community's commitment to playing a leading role on the global stage was apparent. A declaration at the European Council in Dublin stated that

The Community and its Member States have a special responsibility to encourage and participate in international action to combat global environmental problems. Their capacity to provide leadership in this field is enormous.

This confidence was built on some experience of negotiating international agreements, such as the Montreal Protocol of 1987 and the 1990 Basel Convention on hazardous waste. Its spirit informed the Community's approach to the UN Conference on Environment and Development of June 1992, the birthplace of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration. It was a pivotal moment, with both the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity being opened for signature after a considerable period of negotiation. Prominent European politicians, including President Delors, were well represented at Rio, establishing a leadership role in contrast to a more cautious US administration.

3. Emergence of the EEAC network

Given these currents and initiatives at Rio and at the EU level alongside the heightened enthusiasm amongst Member States to create or foster advisory bodies addressing environmental themes, it is not unexpected that the impetus to create the EEAC can be traced back to 1992/1993.

The Swedish Environmental Advisory Council (MVB) had been founded in 1968, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) in the UK in 1970, and the Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU) in Germany in 1971. Informal contacts will have taken place between them and with the growing group of councils established in the early 1990s. The first formal contacts between the RCEP and SRU seem to have taken place when both were working on substantial enquiries into the subject of transport at the beginning of the 1990s and the SRU was invited to London. This led to more regular exchanges and sometimes co-operation.

The idea of a meeting of similar bodies in Europe, although not a permanent network, first arose in Belgium quite spontaneously in the respective councils for Flanders (Mina-raad) and Wallonia (Walloon Council for the Environment). Hubert David, vice-chair of the Flemish Environment and Nature Council (Mina-raad), and Raymond van Ermen, chairman Walloon Council for the Environment were considering the role of their institutions, and what they could do to push forward the agenda under the Belgian EU Presidency in 1993.

They launched a project to discover which environmental advisory bodies like theirs existed in other European countries and what they did, established criteria to distinguish them and in due course (and in partnership with the Brussels Council for the Environment) invited them to a conference in Brussels. This was held in July 1993 under the title "Conference of European National and Regional Environmental Advisory Councils and Actors in European Environmental Policy". Invitations were also sent to countries where governments were thinking about setting up councils, as a number were.

The themes of this event included the need for longer-term planning for the environment, with the Netherlands taken as an example. Participants also discussed a number of policy tools that could be used for this purpose, such as impact assessments and funding mechanisms. Gerrit Vonkeman of IEEP presented a paper describing the role of the councils that were in place, making a clear distinction between ‘societal’ and ‘scientific’ councils, a typology that has remained relevant to the present day. The majority were in the former category, and this also tended to be true of the new generation of sustainable development councils being created in response to the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro.

Box 2: Advisory bodies, independence and expertise

Advisory bodies of the kind belonging to the EEAC are generally established by national or regional governments with the explicit task of giving independent policy advice. The advice may be intended for government, parliament, the head of state or more than one recipient, but written reports are made public. Their composition and independence is organised in various ways, but certain features are the norm:

- The council members are independent experts, mainly drawn from science, the business community, non-governmental organisations, and sometimes trades unions.
- They are independent from the government they advise, and should be free from political influences and private interests.
- Council members are appointed by the government / head of state.
- Council work programmes are usually based on a combination of responses to requests from the government and topics they have chosen themselves.
- Councils decide whether to take on topics and to provide advice and, if so, what approach and working methods to employ, involving external experts and/or stakeholders as they see fit.
- They have their own budget and secretariat, but the secretariats are mostly administratively connected to the government they advise.

The EEAC member councils are rather diverse in their composition and their relationship to their respective governments, political systems and stakeholder communities. Their working methods and the degree of freedom they have to operate together within a network of national and regional councils also varies. So too does their latitude within this network to seek to influence the EU or international bodies. They do not necessarily have exactly the same hopes of what they can gain from a network like the EEAC. For most, the exchange of knowledge and experience and enrichment of the advice they can provide is of key importance. However, for other councils the opportunity to engage in policy debates and

potentially exert influence, especially at a European level, is also of particular value.

One way to categorise the councils is according to the type of members they have, how they define themselves and how they are seen by others. Three main types emerge from the literature:

1. Scientific bodies:

- An expert body (which tends to be focused on one area of work or topic). Scientific advisory committees are often set up to address issues such as air pollution or pesticides. They are not often EEAC members because of the broad remit of the EEAC. The UK Committee on Climate Change, not currently a member, could fall in this group.
- A body of experts. The German SRU and WBGU and the UK RCEP could be described in this way. They tend to be multidisciplinary, although usually dominated by academics.

2. A stakeholder body. Members are chosen to be representative of particular interest groups in society and the council derives its authority from this structure.

Some environmental councils and sustainable development councils are organised in this way (CADS, CNTE, NESC, FRDO, Mina-raad).

3. A mixed expert body. Members contribute knowledge derived from a mixture of scientific experience, and experience in business, public administration, NGOs and civil-society organisations. They are appointed in their own personal capacity and must act independently from the particular interest group they are connected to (e.g. Rli, OKT, RNE, CADS and CNADS).

Sources: Niestroy, 2015; Macrory and Niestroy, 2004; De Vries, 2015; consultations with members 2017

The idea of councils co-operating, getting abreast of developments in the EU and contributing to policy debates – particularly of a longer-term rather than immediate nature – was extensively discussed at this first conference. There was support for the initiative from both the European Commission (Professor Brinkhorst, the Director-General of DG Environment, spoke) and the European Economic and Social Committee. The emphasis was not wholly on the EU relationship, however, and Hubert David spoke on the importance of co-operating inter-regionally.

The German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU), one of the most prominent of the scientific councils in Europe, then took up the task of organising a second conference the following year (1994), with support from the RCEP. This conference was entitled 'Role and Function of the European Advisory Councils in Implementing Agenda 21 and Promoting Sustainable Development', a theme that has remained central to the EEAC. The value of a more formal network became clear and was made operational in a series of steps based on pivotal annual conferences and thematic working groups with their own programmes of meetings and activities. This model has remained in use to the present day. It was a bottom-up rather than centrally planned initiative and has maintained much of that character subsequently.

What has happened since?

4. Shaping a sustainable development agenda for Europe

The term ‘sustainable development’ was first brought into the political mainstream and defined in broad terms by the Brundtland Commission, which published its influential report in 1987, ahead of the Rio Conference. The concept that the needs of future generations should not be compromised by the actions and development pathways adopted today has not been articulated in exactly these terms in EU law. However, sustainable development is now embodied as a formal goal of the EU in the Lisbon Treaty, with the stipulations that the EU “shall work for the sustainable development of Europe” and “shall contribute to the sustainable development of the Earth”.

Many organisations, including EEAC members, were active in supporting this change in long-term objectives at the national as well as EU level. Its importance has been underlined by scientific advice on topics such as climate change and the state of biodiversity and the world’s oceans, accompanied by a growing appreciation of planetary boundaries. However, translating principles of this kind into practical action and changes in shorter-term planning has proved much more difficult.

Although there was widespread support for the Agenda 21 process in many European countries, dislodging the paradigms of economic performance and pursuing environmental policy integration, as advocated in the fifth Environmental Action Programme, was not particularly easy and progress was rather patchy. Nonetheless, after 1993 there continued to be advances at a strategic level. These included the introduction of Article 6 in the Maastricht Treaty and agreement on the Cardiff process of reporting, reviewing and future target-setting for key economic sectors at the European Council meeting in June 1998.

These developments were actively supported by the EEAC. As noted already, the second EEAC conference in Berlin considered the role of Councils in relation to sustainability and Agenda 21. The sixth conference in Tuusula in Finland examined policy integration and implementation, and benefited from the presence of newer members following the decisions of Austria, Finland and Sweden to join the EU.

Progress was slower in specific areas such as energy, agriculture and transport, despite the initiation of the Cardiff mechanisms. The strategies produced were generally considered to be vague and rather weak, inclined to maintain the status quo and future measures that already had been agreed, often treating extant policies as more or less a given. In agriculture, for example, there was resistance to deeper ‘greening’ from most Member States. When reform did come in 2003, it was driven primarily by the European Commission, as described below.

In the energy sector, the merits of investment in conservation and renewables were recognised, but there was little appetite for truly substantial change in most Member States until the advent of more demanding climate policies changed the context. There were several efforts to revive the Cardiff process and it continued to have a role for several years. However, some of its functions were subsumed or obscured by the ten-year Lisbon Strategy adopted by the European Council in March 2000, and the separate but related Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), which was at least partly endorsed by the Gothenburg European Council in June 2001.

The Lisbon Strategy was intended to stimulate economic growth and employment through a series of structural reforms. By contrast, the SDS presented an opportunity to revive the focus on sustainability and include the environment in the set of review processes at the heart of the Lisbon Strategy. Many EEAC members were involved in the debates preceding the adoption of the SDS, the Gothenburg Council, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development that followed. In 2000, the EEAC established a Working Group to contribute to the preparation of the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development. This group became one of the most active components of the EEAC network over the following decade.

At the outset, the Working Group produced a statement entitled 'Greening Sustainable Development Strategies', following initial meetings with European Commission officials, and in consultation with the EEAC member councils. Working Group members recall that this was not an easy process, with discrepancies between different viewpoints to be bridged while retaining real substance and avoiding bland generalisations. It was the first time that so many councils had collectively signed up to a rather detailed analysis and a set of proposals, which were aimed at the EU level and the European Commission in particular. The statement became a distinctive voice from a new quarter, and was presented and discussed at a conference in Stockholm in February 2001. This event was hosted by the Swedish Environmental Advisory Council (MVB) and attended by representatives of government, industry and environmental groups, as well as members of advisory councils.

The statement offered a full analysis of the concept of sustainable development and proposed changes in the EU's institutions and procedures. It argued that:

- A sustainable development strategy should address the most important long-term environmental problems.
- It should establish clear objectives and apply well-chosen targets and indicators.
- The more extensive use of environmental indicators should be an integral part of EU policy within the Lisbon process, with performance reviewed in a holistic way, not by simply adding environmental indicators to existing social and economic ones.
- The latter indicators should be re-examined and modified if necessary in the light of the environmental implications of pursuing the associated goals.
- To ensure the effective implementation of environmental measures, the environmental performance of individual sectors and states should be monitored and assessed regularly at the highest political level.

This set of messages may well have had an impact on some of the participants at the Gothenburg Council, including those from the Commission and the Member States which had been exposed to the EEAC's arguments, it is difficult to tell. Many of the more environmentally ambitious measures proposed by the environmental community and the Commission were not accepted by the Member States, which opted for a more cautious approach. Indeed the SDS was stripped down to only four pages of procedures and principles, focusing primarily on four priority themes: climate, sustainable transport, public health, and natural resource management. It was seen by the Council as adding a third, environmental dimension to the Lisbon strategy and establishing "a new approach to policy-making". The exact role of the SDS and its relationship to the Lisbon strategy was never clear to many stakeholders. Its potential was diminished by the strong preference of the President of

the European Commission from 2004 to 2014, Mr Barroso, to maintain it as a second-tier pathway whilst the Lisbon Strategy was pre-eminent.

The combined voice of formally appointed councils from different parts of Europe will have attracted attention and carried some authority, however. Most of those involved whom I have interviewed are relatively modest in their assessment of the political impact of this synchronised initiative. Nonetheless, as Macrory and Niestroy have suggested, “the endorsement of the statement by a number of councils from CEE accession countries was especially significant and undermined any simplistic assumption that accession states were solely interested in seeing a Community pursuing conventional patterns of growth and economic development” (Macrory and Niestroy, 2004).

Box 3: Environmental and sustainable development indicators

In 2001 at the 9th EEAC Annual Conference in Ghent, Belgium, there was a more in-depth focus on environmental indicators for sustainable development. Environmental and sustainable development advisory councils from the different candidate countries, which were now progressively engaged in the network, joined EU network members. They shared experiences concerning environmental indicators in their own country, and discussed how these indicators could be better deployed in European policy-making.

Environmental indicators can be used to monitor the development of one or more variables in the environment and the wider state of the human environment in any one country. At the same time, they have a role in mapping and comparing the degree of environmental and social progress in specific sectors of the economy, in different domains of government policy, and in various countries. The role of well-chosen indicators in evaluating the impacts of government policies and setting measurable future goals was also emphasised.

Engagement in this more technical aspect of sustainable development continued after the Ghent conference. Simon Upton of the OECD participated in the conference, and from then on there was ongoing contact with the OECD on the issue of impact assessment and indicators. Ingeborg Niestroy, EEAC Secretary General at that time, provided an article on this issue in the OECD study ‘Conducting Sustainability Assessments’ in 2008, for example (OECD, 2006).

Sustainable development and the governance of the environment remained important themes for the EEAC in the years that followed, with work at a detailed level as well as on more strategic topics. One area of interest was the role of different institutions and mechanisms in putting sustainable development principles into practice, marshalling the support of stakeholders rather than trying to proceed largely by regulation. Another focus area was identifying the lack of links not only between the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and the Lisbon Strategy, but also between the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and national and regional sustainable development strategies. The EEAC has contributed to the improvement of these links, including proposals for better and more connected monitoring and review mechanisms.

The role of national sustainable development strategies and councils was considered, along with different aspects of indicators. Some of the approaches adopted in nine different countries were presented in a benchmark study by Ingeborg Niestroy on 'Sustaining Sustainability', which was widely circulated and quoted (Niestroy, 2005; OECD, 2006).

The 16th EEAC Annual Conference in Bordeaux, France, in 2008 was devoted to making long-term sustainable development policies work, covering topics as diverse as social justice, demography, markets, education, culture and the business perspective. It was the year of the financial crisis and a slowing down in environmental ambitions had occurred already. This did not prevent the councils from producing a statement on 'Sustaining Europe for a Long Way Ahead'. Neither did it inhibit the then chair, Frans Evers (of the Dutch Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and the Environment (RMNO)) from sending a copy to French president Nicolas Sarkozy and many others. He argued in a confident tone that the statement "combines the worries of many people on the climate and other long-term environmental concerns with suggestions of sustainable solutions for the present financial problems".

More recently this strand of EEAC activity has focused on the UN 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, the 17 SDGs and the implications for Europe, now being actively debated with a range of different partners at conferences and other initiatives.

A memorable example was the 22nd EEAC Annual Conference 'A Balanced Future: Social Capital and Human Aspects of Sustainable Development', which was held in 2014 in Budapest, Hungary. The conference was organised by Gabor Bartus and Rita Korbuly-Biacs of the Hungarian National Council for Sustainable Development (NFFT). The conference discussed varied topics, such as demographic developments and generational imbalances in Europe, politics and policies of sustainable development, as well as financing the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The 24th EEAC Annual Conference was held in 2016 in Barcelona, Spain, and considered 'Resilient Policies for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. This event was organised by the Advisory Council for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia (CADS), and contributed to an active debate.

In the same year the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) organised the [Open SDGclub.Berlin](#), an inclusive and collaborative platform for mutual encouragement to all those who embrace the transformative character of the Agenda 2030. A first meeting took place in Berlin in November 2016, where lively debates generated many ideas for individual and collective follow-up actions on the ground.

As part of this dialogue, new themes concerning the relationship between science and society are being explored. The need for a strong evidence base is particularly clear where policy solutions cut across short-term interests and create losers as well as winners, which is frequently unavoidable. However, the authority of scientists and experts – one of the bedrocks of sustainable development policy – is being questioned and by-passed in new ways. At least, there is diminished automatic deference towards science and expertise (Owens 2015). Abbreviated messages and diverse modes of communication have become even more prominent in a swathe of popular political discourse.

Often this seems to be at the expense of deliberative argument and a dispassionate presentation of facts and the likely consequences of certain choices. This creates threats to a rationally ordered sustainable development agenda, but it also raises questions about the role of expert and stakeholder bodies that councils are well-positioned to explore and to respond to creatively.

5. Enlargement of the EU and governance issues

Whilst product standards and pollution control were at the heart of EU environmental policy in the early years and remain important, its reach has grown considerably to include establishing and improving processes and procedures designed to lead to better decisions. An important Directive on environmental impact assessment was introduced in 1985, for example, and has been amended several times since. A Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment as a tool for sustainable development was added in 2011. Citizens' rights in relation to the environment have been extended, notably with respect to freedom of information and access to environmental justice, principally since 2005 when the EU became a party to the Aarhus Convention. Establishing appropriate means of participation in environmental decisions has been recognised as a critical, albeit often contentious, issue at different levels of governance from the EU downwards.

Governance issues are fundamental to the work of the individual councils, many of which have a particular concern with representing the views of stakeholders, seeking consensus, enlarging participation, and forming a bridge between science and society. At a European level, the institutional challenges of incorporating sustainability into development pathways has been a critical field for the EEAC, as outlined above. However, work has also been carried out on highly focused policy issues.

One example of this is the examination of impact assessment methodologies by the Governance Working Group. At a time when impact assessments were attracting increasing attention as a tool for evaluating policy proposals before they emerged, it was far from clear whether the assessments undertaken by the European Commission and by Member States were of sufficient quality to meet increasing expectations.

The Working Group examined the principles involved in preparing a satisfactory impact assessment and reviewed some examples, concluding with a Statement and an associated Background Paper entitled 'Impact Assessment of European Commission Policies: Achievements and Prospects' in 2006. This paper explained the significance and value of impact assessments, including as a learning process. It also discussed some of the challenges involved in adopting an integrated approach rather than undertaking separate assessments. A truly integrated approach needs to ensure that trade-offs are visible in an open political process rather than obscured. In addition, the environment needs to be given due weight rather than under-emphasised. The results were discussed with the European Commission, attracting interest from both the Secretariat-General and DG Environment. They provided direct input for the independent evaluation of the European Commission's impact assessment system which was undertaken in 2006.

On a larger scale, one of the most fundamental developments in Europe since the early 1990s has been the enlargement of the EU to embrace thirteen new Member States, predominantly in Central and Eastern Europe. This has had various implications for society, the environment and the economy, as well as for the actors involved in making and implementing environmental policy. There is no space here to offer an analysis of the impact of EU enlargement on environmental policy. However, it is worth stressing that the new Member States were under considerable pressure to implement the established EU environmental acquis as soon as possible, often by the date of accession. In many cases this was possible by adopting the required legislation in national Parliaments. However, the capacity to implement the required measures in practice was much more limited, given the resources and institutional capital available.

While the evidence is not easy to assemble, this situation is likely to have led to large-scale non-compliance with certain legislation. It also added to the implementation gap that was already a feature of environmental law in the 'old' Member States. At the time, this may not have registered as a major concern, but in due course it may well have contributed to the increased scepticism in many Central and Eastern European countries about raising environmental standards and the costs, real or exaggerated, of full compliance.

Whilst many stakeholders in the EU 15 expected the new Member States rather rapidly to form a coalition to oppose new environmental legislation, this did not occur. In fact, for several years these countries showed a remarkable level of support for the proposals put before Environment ministers. More recently this support has diminished, for example in relation to climate mitigation measures. The Visegrad countries more often take a joint position to protect what they see as their common interests. Nevertheless, the quality of the natural environment in large areas of the CEE countries where intensive agriculture has not been dominant is higher than in many of the equivalent areas further to the West. Some of the most extensive Natura 2000 networks can be found in this part of Europe, Slovakia being one example.

Nonetheless, EU enlargement occurred at around the time when the process of extending the environmental acquis was slowing down. There were several reasons for this, including concerns about costs and administrative burdens, the not inconsiderable task of implementing existing measures, the rise of the climate change agenda, and the increasing shadow of economic insecurity. There were also many more ministers round the table to debate and agree proposals and a wider range of perspectives to take into account. Some of the larger Member States were most opposed to the adoption of a directive on soil protection, which seemed to many in the environmental community to be the largest 'gap' in the environmental acquis.

The progressively cooler period for environmental policy was more pronounced following the 2008 recession. This ushered in a period of review, re-assessment and more limited new initiatives, although there continued to be selective areas of continued activity and policy formation, climate mitigation being the most notable example.

Box 4: Expansion and retrenchment in the EEAC

In 2003, the EEAC, then ten years old, broadened its remit to include councils for sustainable development. The organisation was renamed as the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils. Several councils from CEE countries also joined the network prior to EU enlargement, for example the Hungarian National Council on the Environment (OKT) in 2000. A list from 2004 includes members from seven CEE countries joining the EU and Croatia as well.

However, this expansion of the network was not long-lived. For reasons that merit separate study, several councils were abolished (RCEP in 2010, for example), merged, or confronted with significant budget cuts. The number of EEAC member councils was severely reduced in the later part of the 2000s. Many governments were re-thinking the role of external advisory bodies at the time, and some were inclined to re-assert the role and influence of ministries over policy-sensitive questions as well as looking for opportunities to reduce costs.

The departure of a group of UK nature and countryside agencies, which had been involved in the network from early on, contributed to the contraction of the network. Whilst having an advisory function, they were different in character to other members, being primarily operational regulators with correspondingly substantial resources in terms of staff and capacity. Given their disproportionate size and governmental functions, they could be seen at times as rather like 'cuckoos in the nest'. With the establishment of the new network of Heads of European Nature Conservation Agencies (ENCA) they withdrew, and joined this or other networks.

The Netherlands, by contrast, has a deep-rooted tradition of specifically advisory bodies grounded in the constitution, and a political culture that values consensus-based decision-making, called 'polderen' (a reference to the historical need for collaboration in water management in order to create polders). The number of such advisory bodies grew over time, and at the end of the 1980s there were around 200 different councils and committees. The pendulum then swung and from the 1990s on a pattern of gradual mergers and selective abolition was evident. In 2012 the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) was set up, replacing five (and now as many as six) previous councils. Three of these former councils were members of the EEAC (the Advisory Council for Transport, Public Works and Water Management (VROM-raad), the Advisory Council for Rural Areas (RLG), and the Wadden Sea Advisory Council (WAR)).

The membership of the EEAC was reduced to about a dozen organisations by around 2010 and income dropped as well. The permanent Secretariat that had been set up to support the network, with an active office in Brussels, had to be wound up and activities were pared back. Membership and levels of activity have grown again in recent years, but there has not been a return to a full-time secretariat.

Many of these issues were foreshadowed in the 7th EEAC Annual Conference on 'EU Eastern Enlargement and European Environmental Policy'. Held in Budapest in 1999 and hosted by the Hungarian National Council on the Environment (OKT), this event attracted delegates from eight accession countries, both advisory councils and ministries. The reflections and conclusions urged intensified co-operation, exchange, support and enhanced provision of advice for the new partners in Central and Eastern Europe. They also set out a variety of policy challenges. Participants reflected on a 'pan-European' environmental policy, for example taking advantage of the lower marginal pollution abatement costs in Eastern Europe.

However, enlargement concerns do not seem to have played a prominent role in the EEAC in the next decade, perhaps surprisingly. The next two meetings held in the then new Member States focused on rural development in Hungary and forestry in Poland, bringing some of the CEE agenda to the table, but in a relatively limited sphere of policy.

6. Land use, agriculture and biodiversity

There have been major developments in thinking and policy within this broad sphere since the early 1990s, but many of the essential issues have changed relatively little. The long process of fully implementing the 1992 Habitats Directive and ensuring effective land and marine management within the Natura 2000 network still continues, although much progress has been achieved. The broader goals in the EU Biodiversity Strategy in 2011, including six targets and twenty actions to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, represent a substantial growth in ambition. However, meeting many of the targets is proving difficult, as acknowledged in the recent mid-term review of the strategy. One reason for this is the reluctance of governments and key economic sectors, including agriculture and fisheries, to increase the scale of investment and make the changes in approach needed to halt the long-term decline of so many species and habitats.

In the MacSharry reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), also occurring in 1992, it would be difficult to discern a very pronounced environmental footprint. However, there was some change in direction away from direct support for output per se, limiting the incentives to increase production and increasing the market orientation of the policy. For the first time Member States were obliged to introduce voluntary schemes offering farmers incentives for environmental management. They were the only measures that governments had to apply within their seven-year Rural Development Programmes.

From this point on, the focus on the environment in agricultural policy increased, in parallel with a programme of liberalisation and alignment with WTO requirements. There have been both tensions and complementarities between these two agendas, as is apparent in the work of the EEAC as well as other organisations active in this arena.

Box 5: Biodiversity, ecosystem services and the need for resilience

The 13th Annual Conference in Oxfordshire drew on the extensive knowledge and resources of the UK countryside agencies, highlighting the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and the need to develop synergies between biodiversity conservation and climate change policies. The statement on biodiversity and climate change, covering both mitigation and adaptation, was signed up to by 21 advisory councils throughout Europe, including six UK councils.

The conference illustrated very clearly how biodiversity loss is being exacerbated by climate change. Whilst mitigation measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are essential, adaptation measures are also required to minimise the risk of loss of plant and animal species. Biodiversity underpins the goods and services provided by ecosystems that are crucial to human well-being and survival. There are significant economic values at risk as well as intrinsic values (inherent worth) and bequest values (value to future generations). The observed and projected impacts of climate change on biodiversity need to be assessed within the context of the dynamism and functionality of ecosystems as a whole. In doing so it is important to distinguish between natural ecological succession and functional processes and climate-driven changes.

Amongst the responses proposed was the adaptation of targets to climate related factors and the establishment of biodiversity indicators to help shape policies for biodiversity and integrate biodiversity needs into other policies. The conference also stressed the benefits of early action to build resilience and help ecosystems adapt sustainably to climate change. These themes - ecosystem services and resilience - were further developed during the 21st Annual Conference in Bangor 'Ecosystems for People, Environment and Economy' and the 24th Annual Conference in Barcelona 'Resilient Policies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development'.

The CAP was one of the principal frontiers in the effort to apply the integration principle discussed earlier. Environment ministers in a number of Member States sought to increase their influence in a sphere of policy traditionally dominated by agriculture ministers, and gained an additional vehicle for this purpose in the form of the Cardiff process. This led to the production of a series of integration strategies for key sectoral policies, including in agriculture.

However, it did not drive a programme of radical change in the CAP, for which there was little appetite in most Member States. Indeed many observers were surprised when the Agriculture Commissioner, Franz Fischler, exhibiting considerable political skills, turned a potentially rather modest 'mid-term review' of the CAP in 2003 into a substantial reform. De-coupled support payments based on the farmed area were introduced as the principal form of subsidy for farmers, in place of more production-linked policies. This offered environmental advantages, including a more developed system of cross-compliance and less incentive to keep too many livestock or over-produce. However, there were also hazards in this model, including the risk of large-scale abandonment of farmland of environmental value because subsidies no longer required annual production.

The EEAC welcomed this relatively radical reform of the CAP. At the same time, the network warned against increased risks of unexpected side-effects and stressed the importance of monitoring any environmental changes arising from policy as they happened. Decoupling of farm subsidies, cross-compliance, compulsory modulation within the first pillar and the strengthening of the second pillar were positive and necessary steps towards a more sustainable rural policy, the EEAC councils stated ('Europe's Rural Resources at Risk', Vac, Hungary, 2005).

Box 6: The EEAC, CAP and sustainable land use

The 3rd EEAC Annual Conference held in 1995 in Reading, UK, laid the foundation for a steady involvement by the EEAC and EEAC councils in the more or less continuous process of CAP reform. The councils brought a strong sense of the variety of rural cultures, environments and farming conditions in Europe and the importance of preserving them. They balanced the pan-European and more production-focused mechanisms of the CAP with more finely tuned rural policies. The councils were a voice supporting the regional diversity of rural economies and the importance of integrated policies for sustainable land use and communities. The need to shift unconditional agricultural production support within the CAP to target-based agri-environmental programmes was identified at an early stage. It was voiced in 1995, well before this became a more widespread vision. The working group was aware of "the risk to biodiversity in Central and Eastern Europe if as a result of negotiation the current 'perverse' subsidies for production were to become available to farmers there and stimulate a significant intensification of production".

International agreements affecting agriculture and policies for land management were also a concern, especially the talks on agricultural trade liberalisation within the WTO, which had a considerable influence on the CAP and design of environmental policies. The EEAC's contribution was distinctive and noticed in the policy debate, at a time when a relatively small community of NGOs had been leading calls for giving much greater priority to environmental considerations in these negotiations and environment ministries were generally cautious and wary of upsetting their agricultural counterparts.

The EEAC Working Group on Agriculture – later renamed as the EEAC Working Group on Sustainable Land Use – was provided with substantial advisory reports and contributions from councils all over Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Germany, Sweden, The Netherlands, and the UK). The UK countryside agencies (EN, CCW, SNH) together with the Dutch councils (RNB, RLG) were generally reform-minded and often in the lead, with contributions from many other councils (SRU, CNADS, OEVAF, Mina-raad, MVB, WBGU, VROM-raad, WRR).

The direction of travel in agricultural policy after 2003 appeared to be towards the build-up of rural development policy in the second 'Pillar' of the CAP, rather than the continued dominance of market measures and generic support for agriculture in the first Pillar. Rural development policy is more tailored to local conditions and defined objectives. It provides a framework for funding agri-environment schemes, mountain and organic farming, appropriate forest management as well as investment aid and measures to increase productivity and, in some cases, more intensive methods.

The EEAC members, along with much of the environmental community, generally favoured the growth of Pillar II at the expense of Pillar I. Making integrated development policy and the available menu of measures work to secure more sustainable agriculture and land use has been a consistent focus of effort. For example, in 2004 the Portuguese National Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development (CNADS) hosted a Working Group meeting setting out the specific risks in Southern Europe connected to the implementation of CAP measures. These included the decline of traditional land management, such as extensive grazing by livestock in areas prone to fires (perhaps an even greater problem now unfortunately) and parallel aid for irrigation and intensification in many arid areas.

New questions about the use of land for producing biomass feedstocks emerged around the turn of the century and proved quite contentious. There were varying views within the network about the scale of biomass production that would be acceptable in environmental terms, especially on farmland. Many seminars were devoted to the vexed questions that were arising, the multi-level nature of sustainable land use and the concrete links with international, European and national policies. It was much harder to find common ground on this theme or to formulate joint conclusions, let alone statements. This became particularly evident at the 18th EEAC Annual Conference held in 2010 in Bruges, Belgium. The Belgian councils organised a conference with sustainable land use as the central topic. Not all members were able to sign an EEAC statement that had been drafted and it was clear that times had changed (see box 12 on working methods).

Since 2010, the focus on land management within the EEAC has decreased. The CAP, meanwhile, has changed significantly with the introduction of 'greening' measures, accounting for 30% of the Pillar I budget following the 2013 reform under Commissioner Ciolos. There is now a fierce debate about whether this regime is effective or offers value for money in environmental terms, or whether it imposes unjustifiable administrative burdens on both farmers and national administrations.

At the same time there has been a review of the EU's nature directives as part of the Commission's programme of 'Fitness Checks'. This enquiry ultimately suggested the continuation of the two key directives as they are, despite a proposal from Commissioner Juncker to merge them. Once again the review underlined the importance of agricultural and forestry practices for the maintenance and restoration of biodiversity in Europe, and this remains a frontline issue.

7. Water policy and the marine environment

The management of water resources and the control of water pollution have been a core topic of EU environmental policy from the very beginning, as noted earlier. At the time the EEAC entered the field in the mid-1990s, the direction of policy was moving towards a new longer-term approach based on comprehensive river catchment management plans, rather than reliance on a growing series of specific individual directives. This led eventually to the adoption of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) in 2000, setting the frame for the next two decades or longer. It was followed by a revised version of the Bathing Water Directive and a new Groundwater Directive in 2006, and a new Directive on Environmental Quality Standards two years later. A Directive on Flood Management was agreed in 2007.

While this sustained level of legislative activity was taking place, work was advancing on marine policy, aiming to introduce some of the same general approach to management as in the WFD in the rather different setting of the marine environment. This led eventually to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) in 2008, in some ways a remarkable initiative to advance EU policy into a new and critical area, where the lack of a legal framework was clearly problematic.

The EEAC Working Group on Marine Issues was set up in 2000, the same year as the Annual Conference addressed coastal zone management and related issues in June at Sesimbra in Portugal. This was only six months before the final approval of the WFD in December 2000. However, the Working Group built on earlier foundations. In 1996 at the 5th EEAC Annual Conference in Stockholm, David Lewis of the RCEP presented the first steps towards the emerging new EU policy for water, later to become the Water Framework Directive. Dirk Uyttendaele of the Environmental and Nature Council of Flanders (Mina-raad), recalls the eye-opening effect of David Lewis's words. At the time, this was completely new and Uyttendaele started to follow the WFD preparation process, as did several of his colleagues.

Box 7: Coastal zone management and the Sesimbra conference

The 8th EEAC Annual Conference was held in 2000 in Sesimbra, Portugal, during the Portuguese Presidency of the EU. This event took place during the final stages of the push to agree the WFD, and is likely to have made a contribution to the process. The conference addressed the interlinkages between offshore and land-based activities, the need for more integrated management, and the possible impact of the Water Framework Directive on coastal zone management. This conference also aimed more directly at influencing the adoption of the WFD, which occurred later in 2000.

Coastal zones are subject to multiple and often conflicting uses and interests. A robust combination of public policies and public opinion was considered necessary to contain the threats to the sustainable management of these coastal ecosystems. However, this condition was not being met by existing provisions in most of Europe. One of the conclusions of the event was that both public bodies and individuals tend to have a narrow land-based vision, which does not fully comprise coastal and sea areas. They need to be appreciated not just as a borderline, but as a larger field of sensitive spaces with national and European dimensions.

The conference considered the upcoming Water Framework Directive as an important step in the direction of a broader integration of coastal areas and coastal waters within a more comprehensive water policy. The EEAC called for concerted action by all the actors involved in the process of sustainable development in European coastal areas, with clear targets and objectives as well as the improvement of scientific inputs into the process of decision-making. In order to achieve these goals, the EEAC actively recommended more decisive EU leadership and guidance in promoting a more integrated approach to management and development policies in coastal areas.

The Portuguese National Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development (CNADS), chaired by Mário Ruivo, was not alone in its concerns about coastal zones and marine issues. Understandably, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU) and other councils in countries with a coastline were involved in marine issues, some in depth. Michael Scott of SNH was a driving force in the 2004 EEAC statement 'Towards a Marine Strategy', and the presentation of this statement at the 12th EEAC Annual Conference in Berlin that year. The network was in the vanguard of thinking on this subject, well ahead of the adoption of the MSFD. The statement was presented at a number of EU conferences on the issue and discussed on several occasions with DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

A key element of the EEAC's message was that a European Marine Strategy should set ambitious goals for the management and restoration of European seas and oceans, rather than merely aiming to prevent further damage. Furthermore, the desired state of the marine environment needs to be defined, following the approach in the WFD. One criterion of a formally desired state could be considered so fundamental that it provides an overarching goal for the entire Strategy. This requirement states that all marine ecosystems should be managed in ways that allow them to function in a balanced, self-sustaining manner in the face of environmental change, supporting both biodiversity and human activities. Crucially, this implies that damaged ecosystems must first be restored to a state that allows them to function in a balanced and self-sustaining way prior to any further management.

EU policy did move a long way in this direction, with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive adopted as the 'environmental pillar' of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy. This created a framework in which Member States need to take the necessary measures to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) in the marine environment by 2020 at the latest. Marine strategies need to be developed to apply an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities.

The EEAC has followed the implementation process, which is now the critical challenge for marine policy, and has contributed to obtaining more in-depth knowledge about the present state of MSFD implementation by the Member States. This was the main purpose of recent EEAC workshops, in 2014 on the implementation of the MSFD, and in 2017 on the WFD prior to the 2019 review. At both events, facts and figures as well as views and insights from scientists and research institutions, NGOs and policy-makers were brought together, and there was active cooperation with the European Commission.

The Working Group on Marine and Water Affairs continues to look at contemporary and future issues, with a recent workshop on lessons learned and future challenges in marine spatial planning. This Working Group works alongside a revived Working Group focusing on fresh water, giving the EEAC an increased focus on the aquatic environment, where securing the commitment of stakeholders to sometimes ambitious goals is a critical task.

Box 8: Engaging in the European policy debate

From the beginning, councils had varying degrees of interest in engaging with EU policy. However, there has been a widespread desire to be well-informed about developments at an EU level, not least to be able to prepare for them at the national level. Certain councils, especially the more scientific bodies, wanted to engage with European Commission officials and others in Brussels to discuss their detailed work and sometimes to offer views on policy developments. Often it could be helpful to do so under the EEAC banner, especially if the topic was politically sensitive. Government-funded advisory bodies rarely have much license to advocate views directly to EU policy-makers, especially if their opinions differ from those of their governments on a particular dossier, as is quite often the case. There was also interest in conveying forward-thinking national ideas to the European Commission and European Parliament, which could be more difficult to do outside the EEAC on a purely bilateral basis. Examples of policy advice and potential influence are many, and are described in several boxes in this report.

However, many councils have never seen it as their role to seek to influence EU policy, and have felt uncomfortable if asked to sign documents which had this as their main purpose. Even if joint positions were not construed as lobbying documents, they were often quite challenging to negotiate, and more so if not all councils were working on or engaged in the topic concerned. The EEAC has not sought to steer its members to work on particular issues in a co-ordinated way, sticking to a more co-operative operational model. This approach prevails today. Influence is exerted through 'softer' and less direct means than in the explicit statements favoured previously (See box 12 below).

8. Climate and energy policy

The beginnings of EU engagement in climate policy date back to the period when the IPCC was established in the late 1980s. This reflects early and successful efforts to influence the international process, including aspects of the UNFCCC, as well as ambitions within Europe. A close interplay between the provisions of EU climate policy and the Union's position in the successive rounds of global negotiations has continued to be a hallmark of the policy. In many respects, this is a large-scale case study of how far the EU has been prepared to tackle a crucial sustainable development issue. More concretely, this concerns issues of science-based policy, the development of targets, taking first-mover positions, engaging in issues with major economic as well as environmental consequences, accepting and negotiating burden-sharing (now referred to as 'effort-sharing') between Member States, etc. This exercise stretches back about 25 years, the same lifespan as the EEAC.

The EU proved a valuable pathfinder and leader during periods when other large developed economies were reluctant to move. At the same time, its internal negotiations on how to meet collective targets, spread costs, develop and propagate new technologies, fund research and development, and influence the behaviour of companies and citizens offer a working example of

how similar issues can be addressed in the wider international community. Both success stories and setbacks can be found.

The ETS, for example, is the largest international emissions trading system with great theoretical potential. However, the way in which it has been managed in a highly politicised environment has led to over-generous caps being put in place, and a carbon price that has been too low to drive down emissions to any great extent. By contrast, the Renewable Energy Directive has obliged Member States to ramp up their investments in renewables in order to meet their targets for 2020, contributing to a substantial reduction in costs.

The EU has addressed both mitigation and adaptation issues, and in 2005 the European Council committed the Union to pursuing policies designed to avoid aggregate global warming of above 2°C. This has led to a series of EU measures and strategies, including certain targets for each Member State to meet. Some governments have been supportive, others more anxious to scale back potentially demanding EU requirements. As a result, tensions over policy and the distribution of effort persist and the EU's leadership position has been weakened. This is an area where quantitative targets and precision in measuring performance have been required, and monitoring and reporting obligations have to be specified in detail. This introduces new challenges, as exemplified by the 'Dieselgate' scandal relating to measuring vehicle emissions in real driving conditions.

All Member States except Poland have agreed on the Low-Carbon Economy Roadmap for 2050. This document sets out a route to achieving an 80 to 95% reduction in emissions by that date, and provides a strong rationale for future policy initiatives to try to keep on this track, including in the challenging areas of transport and agriculture. Current proposals for EU emission reductions by 2030 and the package of supporting legislation now in the process of being agreed look unambitious from this perspective.

However, policy development has needed to take place in response to both international and internal agreements. This has resulted in a level of momentum being maintained since 2005, while such momentum has been reduced in mainstream environmental policy. Emissions need to fall sharply in future. While Member States have retained a large degree of legal competence over energy policy so that different pathways to meeting targets are legitimate, there are common standards in many areas and a growing commitment to the Energy Union. This should facilitate the transmission of more electricity across national boundaries, and assist the transition to renewable and more dispersed sources of power generation.

EEAC members have contributed to this panorama of measures and accompanying debates in different parts of Europe in a variety of ways. SRU, for example, has played a leading role in demonstrating that it is possible to run a national electricity supply sector entirely on renewables, which previously many experts doubted. This analysis was widely shared with partners and other actors and has proved influential.

The partners also have been active in making the case for increased attention to energy conservation in policy and practice. 'Energy Efficiency – Key Pillar for a Competitive,

Secure and Sustainable Europe' was the topic of the 2007 EEAC Annual Conference in Evora, Portugal. The conference reinforced the case for a stronger EU policy in this area, where many Member States have been unenthusiastic about any binding EU measures.

The role of renewables, and bioenergy in particular, has been another area of joint concern and activity. The publication of the EC Communication on Renewable Energy (2004) and the Biomass Action Plan (2005) stimulated a response by EEAC member councils. Substantial work on biomass and renewables already had been carried out by different councils (RCEP, SRU, WBGU and others). This work triggered debate about the unintended effects of the growing scale of biofuel production, and the need for a proper assessment framework for incentive schemes and other policies aiming to increase the supply of biofuel, given the negative carbon footprint of some feedstocks and fuels.

Box 9: Addressing biofuel and agrofuel targets

The EEAC Working Group on Energy held a workshop entitled '10% Agrofuels: a prudent target? Setting the right priorities for agroenergy use' in Brussels in January 2008.

This workshop brought together the work and views of the advisory councils in order to inform the Brussels community about the analyses of experts, scientists and stakeholders in the Member States. The chair's main conclusions were that renewable energy from biomass may play an important role in meeting bioenergy targets, but a more careful balance must be found between land use for energy and other uses, both within the EU and globally. Therefore the European Commission, the Member States and the European Parliament need to revise downwards the overambitious target for biofuels in transport, at a minimum allowing for interim reviews in order to consider new evidence.

It was also recommended that the European Commission, the Member States and the European Parliament should reformulate the sustainability criteria to become stricter and more directly enforceable. In addition, they should advance international negotiations on a global framework to address the indirect social and environmental consequences of biofuel production.

The workshop was the first of its kind for the EEAC, addressing the Brussels community directly. It was a clear success, showing that advisory councils can act as a kind of 'alert barometer', as several of them were addressing the same issue at the same time with similar concerns. The event also demonstrated that they are able to react quickly when required, but in a joint fashion under the EEAC umbrella. This could be achieved without the formalities and extended timescale required to negotiate a formal joint Statement, a product that was no longer frequently used by the EEAC.

At the spring summit of 2007, the European Council formulated the target of achieving a 20% share of renewables in final energy consumption in the EU and a 10% share for alternative transport fuels, in practice principally biofuels, by 2020. The transport sector target was contentious from the outset. On the one hand, the European Council wanted to have legally binding targets. On the other hand, these targets were considered by many to be appropriate only under certain conditions, such as the availability of sufficient quantities of second-generation biofuels or the firm

application of sustainability criteria to feedstock and fuel production. During a special session at the Evora conference, many EEAC councils raised doubts about whether the conditions really could be met. Their main concern was that it is difficult to ensure the sustainability and efficiency of biofuels as a climate mitigation option. However, there were also doubts about whether biofuels would achieve a sufficiently high market penetration to meet the target by 2020.

In January 2008, the European Commission launched a proposal for a Renewables Directive, which would make those targets legally binding on Member States if adopted by the European Council and Parliament. By that time, many councils had produced statements and reports on this topic, while some were in the middle of their deliberations and were interested in sharing analyses and perspectives. A workshop for this purpose was held in Brussels.

Box 10: The Paris Agreement and beyond

At the end of November 2015, after a period of considerable uncertainty in international climate politics, the COP21 brought representatives of close to 200 states to Paris. The purpose was to negotiate a new international agreement to control greenhouse gas emissions and address the effects of climate change. It was far from certain that agreement could be achieved, given the significant gaps between the positions of leading players. External pressure, momentum and diplomacy was required from organisations independent of the governments in the formal negotiations, including bottom-up civil society initiatives. The 23rd EEAC Annual Conference hosted by the French National Council for Ecological Transition (CNTE) was held in Paris on the eve of the final negotiations. This event focused on the role of civil society in climate change mitigation and adaptation processes. The Conference found that the precise role of civil society varies between contexts. However, it generally includes scrutinising the policy approaches of governments, raising expectations, monitoring policies, increasing transparency, offering credible assessments and critiques, disseminating good practices, and acting as a vehicle for public participation.

The Paris Agreement, steered skillfully by the French hosts, ignited new energy in climate policies in China, the US (at the time), Europe and elsewhere. The focus is now on the measures that signatory states need to take in order to meet their commitments, including legislation and the active engagement of major sectors and stakeholders. The EEAC Working Group on Climate and Energy has organised a number of recent workshops on the role of national climate mitigation laws and official climate committees in implementing the Paris Agreement. A wide variety of national and European specialists has been involved in the debate on the role, experiences and usefulness of different approaches to climate legislation. This theme continues to be a priority for the EEAC, with the aim of sharing and widening understanding, strengthening the knowledge base, and promoting best practices.

More recently, the EEAC members have engaged with the recent Paris Agreement and its aftermath. This sets the stage for the next generation of climate policies. They are also continuing to undertake work on renewable energy, investment in new energy systems, and the phasing-out of energy technologies based on fossil fuels.

9. Towards a circular economy

Legislation and policies on the management and prevention of waste and the promotion of recycling and re-use have been developed within the EU over several decades. For example, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive dates from 1994, the Landfill Directive from 1999, and the comprehensive Waste Framework Directive from 2008. These measures have greatly reduced the volume of waste disposed of to landfill and have promoted recycling. However, the volume of waste remains high, large quantities are disposed of by incineration, and levels of re-use of materials are relatively low. Measures to reduce the volume of waste in the first place and to increase the overall level of resource efficiency are increasingly attractive in environmental terms and potentially a sizeable source of future jobs.

A more visionary step beyond the current range of waste-related directives was the Roadmap to a Resource-Efficient Europe produced by the Commission in 2011 as part of the Europe 2020 process. This forward plan is aimed at promoting sustainable development through a variety of measures for decoupling resource use from economic growth and conserving raw materials for future generations. However, attention at present is concentrated more on the concept of the circular economy, where materials are fully used and products are designed to eliminate waste as far as possible.

Resource scarcity, the Roadmap, the growth of producer responsibility and opportunities for new enterprises, along with a growing awareness of the shortcomings of the present linear economic model, have paved the way for the concept of the Circular Economy. This model is gradually infiltrating public dialogues in the domain of resource management and being referred to in policy ideas and initiatives at different levels, from the local to the European. The success of this concept illustrates not only the appeal and timeliness of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's formulation of the issue, but more generally the creative interactions between research and other knowledge institutions, the private sector (private foundations, businesses and NGOs) and governments. A role has been opened for independent advisory councils to play in bringing together these initiatives and insights in their own settings and to contribute to a European response as well.

Creating a circular economy poses challenges for every country, but it also promises benefits and opportunities for innovation. The overall goals and methods of a circular economy generally need to be tailored to the specific situation of each country and region. The Dutch Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) kicked off the process of implementing the concept of the circular economy in the Netherlands with a challenging advisory report on logistics for the Dutch government. This publication was entitled 'Dutch Logistics 2040: Designed to Last' and appeared in 2013. This was followed in 2015 by an advisory report more specifically focused on the circular economy. One reason why this council may have moved early to take up this concept may be because, unlike many others, it is the result of the merger of five predecessor councils. Since 2012, the Rli remit has covered infrastructure and logistics, energy and hazardous substances, as well as the fields of the environment, spatial policy, and green policy.

Other EEAC councils have also been engaged in advisory activities relating to waste treatment, resource scarcity and efficiency, and translating the circular economy concept for the national context. In doing so they start from sometimes quite different points of departure and may concentrate on different strands of what is a broad agenda. For example some focus on analysis of the current economic model and related resource consumption, others on education and raising awareness of the challenges of behavioural change.

Box 11: Europe goes circular?

The European Commission launched its circular economy package on 2 December 2015. Every country and region and each local institution will have a role in devising a policy approach for implementing the circular economy in its own setting. The EEAC Working Group on the Circular Economy has organised a number of events to facilitate mutual learning, and to track progress in different parts of Europe. In the past two years, members have contributed to conferences at the EU and international level, and have organised their own events.

In summer 2017, the Working Group published a document entitled 'Europe goes Circular', which gives an overview of the strategies and policy initiatives adopted for implementing a circular economy in the different EEAC member countries. It also outlines the role played by advisory bodies in the implementation process, and offers a reflection on the progress made in implementing a circular economy at the national and regional level. These EEAC activities are clearly complementary to the more formal studies and seminars initiated by the EU institutions and seem to fit together well.

10. Conclusions and outlook

Even in this brief and selective history, the extent of progress that had been made in twenty-five years is immediately apparent. The environmental agenda has broadened and deepened and standards have been raised in many spheres, including air and water pollution, waste disposal, and carbon efficiency. The EU and its Member States have played an active part in a first round of efforts to establish sustainable development as a core principle and a signpost for long-term social, economic and environmental change. A range of policy devices for bringing this principle into the machinery of government have been tried out, and the participation of non-governmental stakeholders has generally increased. The Treaties forming the foundation of EU law have been amended in the process.

However, most of these achievements can be traced to the years before 2008-2010. Advances are still being made in certain areas, such as the circular economy and several aspects of climate and energy policy. The ecosystems approach has made inroads into the Common Fisheries Policy, and a large-scale experiment in 'greening' agricultural policy is underway. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the momentum that was behind environmental policy in the 1990s has been lost. There is less appetite for higher standards, more caution in introducing EU measures (especially regulatory ones), and a need to justify environmental initiatives more forcefully in relation to economic and

employment arguments. New ideas are now swimming against stronger tides. The Sustainable Development Strategy has become lost in the undergrowth of successive strategic plans, most recently President Juncker's ten-point plan, which seems quite difficult to reconcile with the direction indicated in the seventh Environmental Action Programme.

The level of commitment to implementing the UN 2030 Agenda in a serious way in Europe is as yet far from clear. The 2030 Agenda is not mentioned in Juncker's State of the Union 2017 speech, although [the Letter of Intent](#) does refer to a Reflection Paper entitled 'Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030' which would be part of the follow-up to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The intentions of the European institutions have yet to be revealed and probably not yet worked through. However, there is an active group of organisations, including EEAC members, which maintain a focus on this agenda and its significance for Europe. This group draws on a much larger and more far-reaching set of networks and experiences than was possible to deploy in 1992. This can only increase the potential to deepen the debate and ultimately make a real impact.

Progressing the sustainable development agenda has never been easy, and the EEAC network can take some pride in its contribution. Convincing evidence and arguments and credible institutions, as well as political leadership and the vision to support it, will continue to be required in a turbulent era. The resistance from vested interests is considerable and short-term economic priorities often remain dominant. However, this agenda can now build on a much broader and more embedded basis in European society than previously, because of the achievements of the last 25 years. There is cause for celebration as well as concern.

The EEAC itself has a relatively small membership, but these councils do represent all the main regions of the EU – South and East as well as the Northwest. This should not be taken for granted in a European network. It no longer has a full-time secretariat, but has found new ways to work with a lighter and lower cost structure and has maintained an active set of Working Groups covering a range of leading topics in a fairly consistent way. Keeping these groups vigorous, interconnected where necessary, plugged into an explicitly global agenda, and abreast of cross-cutting issues such as human health or Better Regulation is not an insignificant challenge. Experience in other networks suggests that pressure on the centre of the network may increase at least proportionately to the growing level of ambition.

The crisis after 2008-2010 – with several member councils abolished by their governments and others leaving the EEAC network – could have raised questions about the network's legitimacy in the longer term and could have even signalled its end. This has not occurred. Instead the EEAC has adopted a change in culture and in some working methods and moved forward, see Box 12. Perhaps the crisis has sharpened the identity of the network as one that, rather unusually, combines a strong body of scientific experts in the wider sense with a spectrum of stakeholders from a diverse set of countries with different perspectives on the European journey.

Box 12: Working methods

According to one recent summary, the EEAC network and its members strive to be mutually supportive, to learn from each other, and to respect and promote viewpoints which transcend national perspectives and are vital for achieving sustainable development and a healthy and resilient state of the environment in Europe and beyond (De Vries, 2017).

Marija Mijuskovic of the Montenegro National Council for Sustainable Development and Climate Change (NCSDDC) highlighted the importance of exchanging experiences between members within the EEAC Working Group on Sustainable Development. She emphasised during the consultations that the way in which the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) is organised influenced the structure of the NCSDDC. In addition, the Hungarian strategy for sustainable development set an example for the structure of Montenegro's national sustainable development strategy.

Every year a conference has been held on a particular theme, with the venue rotating round the members, rather than adopting a Brussels-centric approach. Much of the detailed work takes place in thematic working groups, often numbering between four and six members. Typically these groups have held regular meetings, organised the themes for certain annual conferences and smaller events, and published occasional papers. Initially they also drew up formal statements as a way of synthesising views and setting out positions. Some have been active in Brussels, organising meetings with the Commission, for example on sustainability indicators, climate policy, maritime issues, or the CAP. At one stage the EEAC Secretariat had three staff members based in Brussels at the Mina-raad offices. This gave the network considerable visibility in the round of European debates, especially in relation to sustainable development.

Occasionally Working Groups have embarked on more international ventures as well. For example, the Working Group on Sustainable Land Use led by Sue Collins of English Nature, visited Geneva in 2000 to discuss its joint statement on 'European Agriculture in the World Trade Organisation Millennium Round' with the Cairns Group and the WTO Secretariat.

While the emphasis on drawing up agreed 'formal statements' was common in the early years, it has declined more recently and statements are no longer issued. This change in view was underlined at the Bruges conference on land use in 2010, referred to above. At this conference, a final EEAC statement to be signed by individual councils was drafted, as had occurred often before. However, not all members felt that they could sign it, putting into question what up to then had been one of the regular products of the network. Several members no longer regarded the complex process of negotiating joint statements as one of the main purposes of the network. Indeed, several had announced in advance that they were not able to sign formal joint statements because this was not permitted by their statutes as advisory bodies, in most cases bound to give advice to their own governments.

The current style is more to bring together experts and representatives of national authorities and often also European Commission officials to discuss an issue, compare ideas and progress in different parts of Europe, make use of benchmarks and perhaps to formulate conclusions, but not to engage in more explicit advocacy. The current EEAC President, Arnau Queralt, has advocated the organisation of more events and interactions with other networks, building up the momentum behind this 'softer' approach and raising the profile of the network.

This could be both a strength and a weakness when compared with some specialist networks of regulators, scientists or judges, for example. At the same time, it may be a helpful foundation for navigating the contemporary tides of relative skepticism about the role of certain experts and detached scientific voices. It could give the EEAC a distinctive place in the panoply of organisations that are seeking a role at the interface of science and society, especially if the network is able to communicate messages in ways that register with the chosen audience.

Within the EU there is continuing debate about how to incorporate science into policy in a dispassionate but relevant and politically sensitive way. The EEAC's members are well-equipped to operate in this domain on the basis of their domestic experiences, and are developing a new modus operandi for EU engagement that seems to fit the current culture of the network. Nonetheless, it is a crowded field at the EU level, and both a confident approach and robust analysis are likely to be needed. A question from Susan Owens, who has given extensive thought to the role of advisory bodies in this field, may be relevant both to the EEAC and to other networks:

- Given the present obstacles and challenges for environmental and sustainable development policies, it could be relevant to reflect on the most effective 'level' for an advisory body to operate in the twenty-first century – regional, national, international – and how it should relate to different legislatures and administrations.

The EEAC network is building up its capacity, confidence and level of activity after a period of retrenchment and very limited resources. The model of engagement has changed, making more use of workshops, collaborative interchanges with a broader range of partners, with less reliance on formal statements. Mutual support and learning are given high priority. Benchmarking has emerged as a useful way to facilitate this, as reflected in the recent EEAC studies on the uptake of the circular economy in different Member States and the overview of the state of play in Europe on developing climate law.

The EEAC is certainly distinctive, but it is not the only network in the field of environment and sustainable development in Europe. There is an opportunity to deepen thinking about the respective roles of different networks, and perhaps to work together more to bridge some of the gap between policy-making and the views of both scientists and well-informed stakeholders. This remains a challenge for EU policy-makers, who are confronted with a flood of views from lobbyists but less deliberative analysis, and may not find it easy to appraise the views of diverse stakeholders in different parts of Europe. Independent advisory bodies are potentially a significant contributor

to new alignments in this area. While limited in their possibilities to act beyond their statutory role, the councils are nodes in other extensive networks of professionals from the scientific world, business, NGOs and wider society.

A final pair of question from Susan Owens could stimulate further thoughts and exchanges at the Maastricht conference and afterwards:

- How should we think in future about the locus and practice of expert advice if, as some scholars argue, our familiar, nested hierarchies of government are likely to give way to hybrid, networked, and multi-level governance formations?
- Would this strengthen the role of networks like EEAC, which can be intermediates between the international/EU level and the national, regional and local level, and give them a crucial role in resolving such issues?

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Appendix I: International and EU policy achievements in relation to EEAC activities

See the figure on page 5

Year/period	International	Europe	Concepts & principles	EEAC activities	Councils/networks
1900 - 1950	global challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · WWI-Great Depression-WWII · Bretton Woods (1944) · UN (1945) · Marshall Plan (1949) 	protectionism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · conservation · preservation 		building national institutions for environment
1950 - 1980	Building global institutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · GATT (1961) · OECD (1961) 	Treaty of Rome (1957) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Common Agricultural Policy (1960) · <u>Early EU environmental policy</u> · <u>1st EAP: prevention is better than cure</u> · <u>'polluter pays' principle</u> (1972) · <u>Waste Framework Directive</u> (1975) · <u>Bathing Water Directive</u> (1976) · <u>Birds Directive</u> (1979) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <u>polluter pays principle</u> · <u>precautionary principle</u> · public goods & services · ecosystem services 		emerging independent councils
1980 - 1992	UN Environment, SD, Climate Change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <u>UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm</u> (1972) · <u>Brundtland Commission 'Our Common Future'</u> (1987) · <u>The Montreal protocol on ozone depletion</u> (1987) · <u>Establishment IPCC</u> (1988) · <u>The Espoo (EIA) Convention</u> 	Single European Act (1987) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · harmonisation of the internal market (art. 100) · EP resolution on climate change 1986 · The fall of the wall/East&West Germany united (1989/1990) · <u>Establishment EEA/Eionet</u> (1990) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <u>sustainable Development</u> · <u>human impacts on the climate system</u> · <u>cross-border environmental impact</u> 		establishment advisory councils in North-Western European countries
1992 - 2000	UN Climate change, SD, Biodiversity, Marine Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <u>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change UNFCCC</u> (1992) · <u>United Nations Conference on Environment and Development</u> (1992, Rio Declaration) · <u>Convention on Biological Diversity</u> (1992, CBD) · <u>The OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic</u> (1992) · <u>Aarhus Convention</u> (1998) 	Maastricht Treaty (1992/1993, art.2, art.3, art 130) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · EC 5th EAP: <u>"Towards Sustainability"</u> · <u>MacSharry Agenda</u> (price cuts, coupled direct payments, accompanying measures) · EU legislation on <u>producer responsibility: packaging, ecolabeling, ecodesign etc.</u> (1992-) · <u>Austria, Finland & Sweden joined the EU</u> (1995) · <u>Agenda 2000: for a stronger and wider Union</u> (1997) · <u>The Cardiff process</u> (1998) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ecosystem approach · <u>environmental protection versus national autonomy & subsidiarity</u> (art.130) · <u>Environmental integration</u> (art. 6 EC Treaty) · <u>public consultation</u> · <u>soft-law, co-regulation</u> 	EEAC formative years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1st EEAC conference in Brussels Assessing the role of Advisory Councils for the Environment in the Community Environmental policy (1993) · 2nd EEAC conference in Berlin Role and Function of the European Environmental Advisory Councils in the Agenda 21 and sustainability (1994) · 3rd EEAC conference in Reading Sustainable Land Use (1995) Start EEAC WG Agriculture · 4th EEAC Annual Conference in Stockholm Sustainable use of water resources (1996) 	16 EEAC member councils in 1999 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · establishing councils in Eastern and Southern European countries (mid '90s) · establishment ENCA (1997)

Year/period	International	Europe	Concepts & principles	EEAC activities	Councils/networks
1992 - 2000	<p>Further globalisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · WWW (1991) · WTO (1995) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <u>Waterpolicy in EU</u>, preparation of the WFD (1991- 2000), after 2000 the WFD and river basin management · 1993/1994 <u>European Environmental Agency</u> set up office in Copenhagen 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 5th EEAC Annual Conference in Vinkeveen, NL, on Self-regulation (1997) · 6th EEAC Annual Conference in Tuusula, FIN Policy Integration and Implementation (1998) · 7th EEAC Annual Conference in Budapest EU Eastern Enlargement and European Environmental Policy (1999) · 8th EEAC Annual Conference in Sesimbra, PT Coastal Zone Sustainable development in Europe (and WFD) (2000) 	
2000 - 2008	<p>Millenium Development Goals (2000)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · World Resources 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems; calling for the creation of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment · <u>Millenium Ecosystem Assessment (2001-2005)</u> · <u>Kyoto protocol</u> entered into force in 2005 	<p>European Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <u>A Sustainable Europe for a Better World:</u> <u>A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development</u> (2001) · <u>European Governance A White Paper</u> (2001) · <u>Mandelkern report</u> on Better regulation (EC, 2001) · <u>CAP Reform</u> · <u>Message from Malahide 'Biodiversity and the EU – Sustaining Life, Sustaining Livelihoods</u> (2004) · <u>EU enlargement with CEE countries</u> (map) · <u>Development of the EU Marine Strategy</u> (Strategy, 2005, Directive, 2008) · <u>EU Thematic Strategy on waste prevention and recycling</u> (EC, 2005) · <u>EC The 2006 Biodiversity Communcation and Action Plan</u> Halting biodiversity loss by 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · governance · better regulation · resilience 	<p>EEAC years of blossom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · EU SD Conference 'Greening SD Strategies' (Stockholm) (2001) · 9th EEAC Annual Conference in Gent Indicators for SD (2001) · 10th EEAC Annual Conference in Kilkenny, Ireland Agriculture and nature in an expanding Europe – can a greener CAP fit I all? (2002) · Start of the EEAC WG SD · 11th EEAC Annual Conference in Firenze · Environmental Governance (2003) · Kinsale declaration SD Policies in EU 25 · 12th EEAC Annual Conference in Berlin · Towards a European Policy on the Marine Environment (2004) · Vac 2005 Rural Development · 13th EEAC Annual Conference in Oxfordshire Climate Change and Biodiversity – Meeting the challenge (2005) · 14th Warsaw Forestry Management (2006) · 15th EEAC Annual Conference in Evora, PT Energy Efficiency – Key pillar for a Competitive, Secure and Sustainable Europe (2007) · Serie of seminars of the EEAC WG agri/Sustainable Land Use · 16th EEAC Annual Conference in Bordeaux Sustaining Europe for a long way ahead (2008) 	<p>32 EEAC member councils in 2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · establishment ESDN (2004)

Year/period	International	Europe	Concepts & principles	EEAC activities	Councils/networks
2008 - 2015	Global financial crisis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-crisis (ecologic, economic, financial, social) COP15 in Copenhagen (2009) Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) (2012) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate and Energy Package (2009) Low carbon economy 2010 Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010) EU Economic Governance (2010) Europa2020 smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010-2020) 7th EAP Living well, within the limits of the planet (2013) Communication 'Towards a Circular Economy: A Zero Waste Programme for Europe' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In search for a new economic model: Green Growth, Green economy, Sustainable economy Circular Economy, as concept launched by Ellen Mac Arthur Foundation SRC, Planetary boundary concept (2009, 2015) 	Facing institutional and financial challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17th EEAC Annual Conference in Dubrovnik Towards Sustainable European Infrastructures/WG Energy (2009) Workshop 'Towards a green infrastructure for Europe' March 2009 18th EEAC Annual Conference in Brugge Sustainable Land Use (2010) 19th EEAC Annual Conference in Wroclaw The "Green Economy" Agenda in the context of SD and Institutional Framework for SD UNCSD > Rio 20plus (2011) 20th EEAC Annual Conference in Rotterdam Keep moving – towards sustainable mobility (2012) 	8 EEAC member councils in 2012 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abolishment and merge of councils in MSs Individual EEAC councils have been working on waste and product policy, and from 2013/2014 on also on Circular Economy
2015	Globals Goals (2015) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paris Agreement 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (17 SDGs) Sendai framework 	Multi-stakeholder platforms EC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-level multi-stakeholder platform on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the EU EC/EEESC: European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inter-generational imbalances; social justice SDGs 	Reinventing the network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 23rd EEAC Annual Conference in Paris Civil Society and Climate Change: On the road to Paris (2015) First steps towards a EEAC WG Circular Economy 24th EEAC Annual Conference in Barcelona Resilient policies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development" (2016) 25th EEAC Annual Conference in Maastricht Towards the 2030 Agenda and beyond: European cooperation within a new citizens–science–policy interface (2017) 	14 EEAC member councils in 2016 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open SDGclub Berlin (2016)

Periods	
1900 - 1950	global challenges/protectionism
1950 - 1992	establishing UN & EU & national environmental & SD policy & institutions
1993 – 2000	formative years EEAC
2000 – 2008	the years of blossom for EEAC
2008 – 2015	EEAC facing institutional and financial challenges
2015 –	reinventing the EEAC network/regaining energy

Appendix II: Responsibility and Acknowledgement

This paper considers 25 years of environmental and sustainable development policies in relation to EEAC and EEAC activities, and has been commissioned by the Dutch Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) as part of the preparations for the 25th EEAC Annual Conference, held in Maastricht, the Netherlands, in October 2017.

The paper provides an overview of the main achievements of 25 years of environmental and sustainability policies, and the role played by the EEAC and EEAC activities. The main purpose of the paper is to draw lessons from the past, and to establish a foundation for further exchanges during Session 1 of the conference. It is not an external assessment of the EEAC, nor an in-depth EEAC history or an analysis of different types of advisory bodies and the role they have played.

The author, David Baldock, an authority on European environmental and SD policy, has been supported by the Rli secretariat in the process of collecting information and organising consultations. Information has been collected from various sources, mainly from the councils involved in the network and a number of key persons involved, both currently and in the past. The working methods comprised desk and archive research, consultations, and written contributions from councils and key persons within and outside the network.

Agneta Andersson, international coordinator at Rli, coordinated this process and provided a variety of inputs for the paper.

The initial draft was reviewed by Prof. Susan Owens, University of Cambridge, and Prof. Richard Macrory, UCL Laws. Both with an in-depth knowledge of the EEAC-network, national advisory bodies and the role of advisory bodies and science in the policy process.

Consultees/contributors

Günther Bachmann, *Secretary-General of RNE, Germany*

Gabor Bartus, *Secretary General of NFFT, Hungary*

Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, *European Coordinator for the TEN-T Mediterranean Corridor, The Netherlands*

Miklos Bulla, *Secretary General of OKT, Hungary*

Nicole van Buren, *chair EEAC WG Circular Economy, Rli-secretariat, The Netherlands*

Susan Collins, *formerly Policy Director of English Nature, Butterfly Association / European Habitat Forum, United Kingdom*

Hubert David, *former Chair of Mina-raad, Belgium, former Chair of the EEAC*

Marcel Dorsch, *WBGU-secretariat, Germany*

Filipe Duarte Santos, *Chair of CNADS, Portugal*

Folmer de Haan, *chair EEAC WG Energy and Climate Change, Rli-secretariat, The Netherlands*

Julia Hertin, *Secretary General of SRU, Germany*

Christian Hey, *Head of Department Climate Protection, State of Hessen, Germany*

Maria Adília Lopes, *Secretary General of CNADS, Portugal*

Heino von Meyer, *Director of OECD Berlin Centre, Germany*
Marija Mijuskovic, *NCSDCC-secretariat, Montenegro*
Ingeborg Niestroy, *former Secretary-General of the EEAC, sustainable development specialist*
Derek Osborn, *formerly of the Sustainable Development Council (UK), formerly of the Sustainable Development Observatory of the EESC, sustainable development specialist*
Inge Paulini, *former Secretary-General of the WBGU, President of the German Federal Office for Radiation Protection, Germany*
Peter Pitkin, *formerly of the SNH-secretariat, United Kingdom*
Arnau Queralt Bassa, *Chair of the EEAC, CADS, Catalonia*
Julie Ser-Istin, *Head of department, CNTE-secretariat, France*
Jan de Smedt, *former Secretary General of FRDO-CFDD, sustainable development specialist, Belgium*
Dirk Uyttendaele, *Mina-raad, Flanders*
Jan Verheeke, *Secretary-General of Mina-raad, Flanders*
Michiel de Vries, *EEAC network coordinator on behalf of MM.V-Consultancy*

Graphic Design

2D3D Design

EEAC Network Foundation

Bezuidenhoutseweg 30

P.O. Box 27

2501 CA The Hague

The Netherlands

www.eeac.eu

