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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION  
**A COMMON PLATFORM:**

**GUIDELINES FOR EUROPEAN UNION PREPARATION FOR THE**

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION**

**TO BE HELD IN NEW YORK IN JUNE 1997**

**TO REVIEW**

**AGENDA 21 AND RELATED OUTCOMES OF THE**

**UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

**HELD IN RIO DE JANEIRO IN JUNE 1992**

## Key Proposals for the Common Platform

### I Background

1. The UN General Assembly will hold a Special Session ("UNGASS") in June 1997, at the highest possible level, to review the implementation of Agenda 21 and the related outcomes of the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992. **There is consensus that UNGASS should not renegotiate Agenda 21, but should review successes, failures and gaps in implementation, identify new issues, and result in an action-oriented political Declaration. The EU hopes that UNGASS will raise the public profile of the Rio process and renew political support for it, so that implementation of the agreements made can move from the preliminary to the fully operational phase.**
2. The EU has developed a domestic agenda for sustainable development, which is likely to be pursued irrespective of UNGASS. **The main potential of UNGASS for the EU therefore lies in promoting sustainable development globally.** Emerging and growing global environmental problems make this increasingly important.
3. However, developed and developing countries will approach UNGASS with different expectations. "Sustainable development" as formulated at Rio and subsequent conferences melds social and economic development with environmental protection. Developed countries have tended to concentrate on the environmental aspects. Developing countries stress the need for economic growth and are disappointed that the developed world has not fulfilled its Rio commitments on financial assistance.
4. Experience before and since Rio has shown that European Union leadership will be essential to a successful outcome at UNGASS. Leadership needs to be built on a strong, well prepared, and united position. This Communication therefore proposes a Common Platform for the EU. (As UNGASS will not lead to any legal agreements, no Council Decision under Article 228 is necessary).
5. An accompanying Working Document of the Commission Services presents an analysis of progress since Rio at the international level and explores a series of achievable objectives for the EU to guide its preparations for UNGASS. The resulting recommendations are set out below. The detailed justification for each recommendation is found in the relevant paragraphs of the Working Document whose numbers are shown besides each paragraph below. This divided format has been chosen in order not to overload this text which sets out the essence of the proposed position and is intended to be the basis for Ministerial debate.
6. The recommendations are consistent with the proposed Decision on the Review of the Fifth Environmental Action Programme and EU policy on development cooperation and UN reform. They cover both ideas which the EU should seek to include in the UNGASS political Declaration and also the future operation of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, which has the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of Agenda 21. The Communication does not deal with possible action within the EU to follow up the results of UNGASS since that cannot be foreseen at present.

## II Recommendations for EU aims on the Nature of UNGASS and on UN coordination

1. **The EU should support moves to hold UNGASS at Head of State or Government level in order to give the Rio process a political kick start.** Participation by government leaders would also emphasise the over-arching nature of sustainable development, and allow agreement on cross-cutting issues which affect many sectors. (I.8)<sup>1</sup>
2. **There should be agreement on another review, Rio + 10, in five years to maintain momentum.** (I.7)
3. **Now that most of the environmental and other frameworks for international action are in place, the priority for UNGASS should be on implementation and making Agenda 21 more operational.** Prime responsibility for different Chapters of Agenda 21 needs to rest with a wide range of different fora. **UNGASS needs to encourage processes other than CSD by giving them an Agenda 21 seal of approval.** (V.29, VII.26)
4. **UNGASS should set the Work Programme for the next cycle of CSD.** The Work Programme must allow CSD to continue to benefit from the involvement of Ministers. It should reflect CSD's responsibility for monitoring the broad theme of sustainable development and its success as a forum for the exchange of experience. CSD decision-making should concentrate on fewer issues and specific objectives. CSD's work needs to be coordinated with that of the other ECOSOC Functional Commissions. (I.11, IV.15, VII.9, 27, 28, 34-37, IX.2)
5. **The future role of CSD will be affected by the results of a number of on-going UN reform processes. EU negotiators preparing UNGASS will therefore need to coordinate with those dealing with UN Reform, to ensure a consistent approach.** (IV.6-10, V.24, VII.30-35)
6. **UNGASS will also need to consider the future role of UNEP and the institutional aspects of environment policy more generally.** From the EU's viewpoint, UNEP Governing Council Decision 18/7, sets out a very satisfactory division of labour between UNEP and CSD and the need now is to ensure that UNEP can play its role effectively. This will be much easier if the 19th Governing Council manages to reform UNEP's Governance sufficiently to restore confidence and attract funding, and if UNEP achieves a satisfactory relationship with complementary organisations such as UNDP and IUCN. **Once the Governing Council ends on 7 February it will be essential to take stock and make proposals for UNGASS.** (VI.30 & 31, VII.36)
7. **UNGASS should also consider the scope for involving non-UN Centres of Excellence on a regular basis in the work of both UNEP and CSD to maximise the effective use of scarce environmental expertise.** (VI.32, VII.37)
8. **"Major Groups" (civil society) must have the opportunity to contribute to UNGASS.** (I.12, V.5, VII.7 & 8)

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<sup>1</sup> These bracketed numbers refer to the relevant paragraphs in the Working Document of the Commission services (SEC (96) 2069)

### III Recommendations for EU aims for the Political Declaration

The Declaration should:

#### *General Conclusions*

1. **acknowledge that only by integrating the economic, social and environmental components of sustainable development in a transparent, accountable and democratic framework which respects and empowers all sectors of society and takes account of common but differentiated responsibilities at the international level, as well as of common but differentiated needs, will it be possible to ensure healthy development. (VII.2-4)**
2. **stress the importance of the Regional Level in an approach based on subsidiarity to improve operational coordination and implementation and urge UNEP to pay renewed attention to the regional level. (VI.16-19, VII.10 & 11)**

#### *Resources for Developing Countries and Economies in Transition*

3. **welcome the recent large increase in private flows, notably in foreign direct investment, to certain countries which have meant that total resource flows in real terms are at an all time high. However, UNGASS should also acknowledge that these flows are guided to a large extent by market signals and so have not benefitted all countries or all sectors equally. UNGASS should ask CSD to consider means of attracting private sector investment in the field of environmental management. (VI.4)**
4. **include a commitment by all DAC donors not to let the level of development aid fall further and to start reversing the trend especially in relation to the least developed countries. Given that aid as a proportion of GNP fell to the lowest level ever recorded in 1995 and dropped by 14% in real terms between 1992 and 1995, such a commitment would be significant progress. If all Member States could so commit themselves, the EU would be in a strong position to approach other major donors seeking a similar pledge. Discussions at UNGASS will need to take account of the outcome of the preceding negotiations on replenishing the Montreal Protocol Multilateral Fund, the Global Environmental Facility and the UNEP Environment Fund, as well as of parallel discussions in ECOSOC on the UN Secretary General's proposals on New and Innovative Ideas for Generating Funds. The discussions on aid will be difficult, but the EU could show positive leadership in committing itself to renewed emphasis on development education to engender positive but realistic public support for aid directed at a more sustainable globalised world. (IV.1-5, VII.12-18)**
5. **acknowledge the progress that has been made since the Brundtland Report and Rio in ensuring greater environmental appraisal of development aid, and urge the generalisation of existing best practice which would considerably enhance aid's contribution to sustainable development, even within existing budgets. UNGASS should also stress that aid is most effective when accompanied by a viable policy framework, stakeholder participation and capacity building. (V.30-33, VII.19)**

6. welcome the attention paid in the Copenhagen Declaration to integrating social development goals in structural adjustment programmes, and call for equal attention to be paid to environmental protection. UNGASS should emphasise that if the environmental dimension is not properly integrated into the design of structural adjustment programmes there can be unintended negative environmental effects which often harm the poor in particular. UNGASS should urge governments to strengthen the environmental dimension of their macro-economic policies, and invite the international financial institutions including the IMF to pay greater attention to this aspect in their macro-economic advice. (V.31, VII.20)

7. draw attention to the need for coherence in national actions, to implement the plethora of plans which have emerged from the round of UN Conferences, and stress the need for assistance in capacity building in developing countries, and for coordination across the UN system and with the Bretton Woods institutions. UNGASS should also call for better coordination in the field between donor agencies within and outside the UN system. (VI.28-29, VII.21)

8. acknowledge that advocating a stronger regional aspect in implementing Agenda 21 will require donor support for poorer regions and pledge that action at the regional level will not divert resources from global problems. (VI.19, VII.10)

#### *Joint Implementation and Activities Implemented Jointly*

9. launch a process, perhaps through an Expert Panel mandated to report to the CSD and ECOSOC, to advance the debate on these activities, building on work already underway in individual Conventions. The aim would be to try to build confidence and set some generally applicable ground rules. (VII.22)

#### *Debt*

10. acknowledge the progress which has been made since Rio, with the launch of the World Bank/IMF Debt Initiative, in which all creditors, including multilaterals, will play their part to ensure that the debt burdens of the highly indebted poor countries in adjustment are brought down to sustainable levels. (V.27, VII.23)

#### *Trade*

11. reaffirm that trade and environment can play a mutually supportive role in favour of sustainable development (i.e. if effective environmental policies and sustainable development strategies are in place, an open multilateral trading system makes possible a more efficient use of natural resources). UNGASS should stress the need for progress in the WTO and confirm that UNEP and UNCTAD must be fully involved in the work. Trade and environment should be included in CSD's 1998 Work Programme to provide a forum for a high-level fully integrated political debate involving Trade, Environment and possibly Development representatives before the Second WTO Ministerial Conference. (VI.11 & 12, VII.24)

### *Investment and the Private Sector*

12. **stress the role of the Private Sector, particularly the need for greater business participation in the sustainable development dialogue, and international efforts to promote voluntary greening of domestic and foreign investment while respecting national sovereignty.** UNGASS could urge banks and insurance companies to subscribe to the UNEP Statements of Environmental Commitment, urge all major companies to undertake environmental reporting and draw attention to the OECD Guidelines for Multilateral Enterprises, as well as any environmental clause inserted into the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. Private Investment should be included in CSD's 1998 Work Programme as a timely input to the Second WTO Ministerial Conference. (V.5-7, VII.25)

### *Environmental Priorities*

The Chapters of Agenda 21 which deal with the conservation and management of environmental resources are its unique contribution to the cause of sustainable development. These Chapters must be considered in depth by UNGASS, with a view to establishing which issues are already well catered for at the international level, and which need further impetus via CSD or other processes. The outcome of this deliberation should be a major component of UNGASS and the EU should press for the Declaration to:

13. **draw attention to the implications of the IPCC Second Assessment Report and stress the importance of a successful outcome to the Berlin Mandate negotiations at the 3rd Conference of the Climate Change Convention in Kyoto.** UNGASS should call for the adoption of a legal instrument aimed at strengthening the original provisions of the Convention for the period beyond the year 2000. This should contain legally binding objectives for emission limitation and significant overall reductions for greenhouse gases within specified time frames, as well as policies and measures to achieve these. However, CSD V and UNGASS should not be used as a parallel negotiating forum for Climate Change. (V.11, VII.41)

14. **send a positive message to the Montreal Protocol meeting welcoming the work done over the last 10 years and stressing the need for strengthened efforts by all.** (V.19, VII.42)

15. **stress the need to give greater attention to renewable energy conservation and self-sustaining energy conservation.** (VII.43)

16. **regret that few other regions have initiated discussions on regional instruments for dealing with transboundary air pollution, charge UNEP with catalysing appropriate action, inter alia by reminding appropriate regional organisations of the serious health and environmental problems created by such pollution, and ask UN ECE to share its experience with others.** (VI.18 & 19, VII.44)

17. **highlight the importance of forests which are likely to be one of the key topics for UNGASS, recognise the very substantial work on forests undertaken since UNCED, stress the need for continued international consideration of the issues and, depending on the outcome of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, urge the rapid implementation of its recommendations or seek to strengthen them. To ensure the best possible outcome from the**

Panel, the December Council should build on the high level of agreement already achieved within the Union and reiterate the main policy statements agreed so far. The EU should express its support for the emerging international consensus which has already allowed the IPF to identify a number of important issues for action. The EU should urge the IPF to make unambiguous Recommendations to CSD V and UNGASS on the following key aspects where there is still a wide divergence of views between groups in the negotiations;

effective institutional mechanisms to ensure strong political commitment and to address technical issues;

mechanisms to improve international coordination and cooperation and enhance assistance to developing countries to promote sustainable forest management;

making more effective use of public and private financial resources at the domestic and international levels;

ensuring that trade supports sustainable forest management, including through policies related to the internalisation of key environmental costs, and the potential positive relationship between sustainable forest management, trade and voluntary certification and labelling schemes.

While expressing a willingness to maintain a constructive dialogue with our partners on the issue of legal arrangements, the Council should reconfirm its support for a specific legally binding instrument which would allow a comprehensive approach taking account of all the environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects of forest issues. Once the Panel has made its Recommendations, the EU will need to adjust its position for UNGASS. Close liaison will continue to be needed between the EU's IPF and UNGASS negotiators. (V.14, VII.45)

18. warmly welcome the entry into force of the Convention on Combatting Desertification and urge all parts of the international community, States and Major Groups to work with this new instrument especially in Africa. Strenuous efforts should be made to solve the remaining contentious issues at the next INCED session in 1997. Attempts to defer them to UNGASS should be firmly resisted. (V.13, VII.46)

19. confirm the need for a regional approach to sustainable mountain development and call upon appropriate organisations to consider issues which require regional solution. UNGASS should also call for CSD's future work on the socio-economic driving forces of environmental change to pay attention to effects on mountain areas. (VII.47)

20. take account of the outcome of the November 1996 Rome Food Summit in the conclusions on sustainable agriculture and rural development, and stress the interactions between freshwater, soil erosion, demography and food security. UNGASS should urge the effective and correct implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements, including the Marrakesh decision on measures relating to the possible adverse effects of the reform programme on least developed countries and countries which are net importers of food. It should stress the need for industrialised countries to adjust their own production in a balanced way which takes account of the need to protect natural resources and landscapes, of

international competition based on comparative advantage in natural conditions, and of their own need for food security. UNGASS should also call for the strengthening of agricultural research and extension systems, and improved dissemination of research results. Equally it should call for coherence between activities undertaken by the FAO in the context of the Global Plan of Action on Plant Genetic Resources For Agriculture and actions under the Convention on Biological Diversity. (V.15 & 16, VI.23, VII.48)

21. welcome the work done by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the production of the Global Bio-Diversity Assessment. UNGASS should call for rapid progress in the negotiations on the CBD Bio-safety Protocol with a view to conclusion in 1998 and welcome the adoption of the UNEP Technical Guidelines for Bio-safety. It should call upon all countries to ratify the CBD and ask the UN Secretary General to bring this call to the attention of non-parties. This would help to ensure that the issue was given a higher profile in the USA. (V.11, VI.20, VII.49)

22. welcome the coming into force of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the adoption of the various international fisheries instruments agreed since Rio. Equally UNGASS should welcome the Washington Global Plan of Action and stress the need for cooperation from all the international organisations mentioned therein. It should also endorse the CSD IV coordination decision, sponsored by the EU, thereby ensuring that oceans feature on CSD's agenda on a regular basis, and that an integrated approach is taken in examining marine resource and pollution issues. (V.17, VII.50)

23. draw attention to the increasing problem of freshwater scarcity with its implications for international security and food production, as well as to the growing danger of water pollution and inadequate sanitation in an increasingly urbanised world. UNGASS should pay particular attention to the Global Water Assessment which will be available before the Session and should promote a regional approach, based on river-basins and watersheds, to water management. UNGASS should also welcome the inauguration of the Global Water Partnership and encourage its regional and river basin approach to water management. (VI.18 & 23, VII.51)

24. welcome the work of the Interorganisation Programme for the Safe Management of Chemicals (IOMC) and of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety as well as the opening of negotiations on Prior Informed Consent (PIC) and, if all goes well at the UNEP Governing Council, Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The need for coherence in the chemicals agenda should be tackled if this has not been dealt with at UNEP GC 19 which will also consider the question of further measures beyond PIC. Any proposals on greater coherence should take account of the need to complete and implement the PIC agreement as soon as possible, and bear in mind the differences between POPs and the list of substances subject to PIC. UNGASS should also stress the need to ensure coherence between global initiatives on POPs on the one hand, and regional atmosphere and marine related initiatives on the other. (V.19, VI.20, VII.52)

25. welcome the progress made under the Basle Convention and call for the timely implementation of the ban on the export of hazardous waste for any purpose to non-OECD countries. UNGASS should urge all countries to ratify the Convention and request the UN Secretary General to bring this call to the attention of non-parties. Again this would help to



ensure that the issue was given a higher profile in the USA. (V.20, VI.20, VII.53)

26. stress the importance of minimising solid waste and the role of economic instruments and the principle of producers' responsibility in so doing. Where waste nevertheless arises and cannot be recovered, UNGASS should stress the need for safe disposal methods. UNGASS should also point to the links with the Habitat Agenda, the Copenhagen Programme, the Washington Global Programme of Action and the Global Freshwater Assessment. (VII.54)

27. draw attention to the forthcoming negotiations for the Convention on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management and point to the problem of the safe management of naturally radioactive waste material as an issue to be addressed at a later stage. (V.21, VI.27, VII.55)

28. welcome the unprecedented degree of local authority participation in Habitat II and press for adequate coordination at all levels in efforts to promote Local Agenda 21 and local level implementation of the Habitat Agenda. UNGASS should point out that the world will enter the new millennium with more than half of its population urbanised. (VI.29, VII.57)

#### *Institutional Matters*

29. recall the responsibility for the coordination of international environmental law given to UNEP by Agenda 21. UNGASS should ask all States and Convention Secretariats to assist in this task especially in an era when Secretariats are being dispersed with all the advantages and disadvantages that this entails. UNGASS should also take account of, and probably endorse, UNEP's recommendations following the Review of the Montevideo Programme. (I.7, V.22, VI.20, 30-31, VII.58)

30. recognise the relative weakness of international environmental institutions and the need for adaptation in a globalising and increasingly interdependent world. While it would not be appropriate to propose new institutions or fundamentally alter the institutional roles set out in Chapter 38 of Agenda 21 at this stage, there is likely to be a need and a willingness for reform in another five years. UNEP should be charged with drawing up proposals for encouraging participation in, and compliance with, international sustainable development law for consideration at a further Special Session of the UNGA. (I.7, VI.30-31, VII.59)

31. recall that CSD is the leading Functional Commission of the ECOSOC in the follow-up of Rio and confirm CSD's role in harmony with recent ECOSOC decisions. (VII.29-36)

#### *Treatment of Cross Sectoral Issues*

32. endorse the proposal to refocus much of CSD's Work Programme on economic sectors, as the driving forces of environmental change. This could help to make the international debate more operational on issues such as the integration of environment into other policies, consumption and production patterns, technology transfer, financial mechanisms, awareness raising and research. It would also reduce the potential areas of duplication between CSD and other Functional Commissions. Nevertheless, UNGASS will also need to stress the continuing importance of the cross-sectoral issues identified at UNCED. In particular UNGASS should reiterate the need to change long term trends in consumption and patterns and to integrate the environmental dimension in decision-making in all sectors. (VI.8-10, 13-15, VII.60-63)

#### IV Recommendations for EU Aims for the CSD and its Future Work Programme

1. **In addition to reducing significantly the number of CSD's Decisions, strenuous efforts are needed to make them more operational. At present Decisions too often rewrite parts of Agenda 21 or are undirected desiderata. Any general statement should be directed at someone for action. CSD's Decisions should also identify much more clearly the actions requested from different UN agencies and establish priorities for a more coordinated implementation of its recommendations by the UN system as a whole. Further efforts are also needed to produce clearer texts. (VIII.2 & 3)**
2. **Further, but modest, donor funding is needed to allow adequate G 77 representation at the government sponsored workshops which are such an important feature of CSD's method of building the consensus needed for important Decisions. (VIII.4)**
3. **If UNGASS is to encourage more regional activity, CSD will need to respond. CSD should play a part in promoting regional approaches to solving problems. It might also be appropriate to hold alternate CSD sessions outside New York in a major regional centre. (VIII.5)**
4. **CSD's role as a forum for exchanging ideas needs to be strengthened and donors should consider earmarking funds to allow relevant officials from developing countries to attend what for them would be valuable opportunities to meet professional colleagues. The idea of using "discussants" to lead the questioning on national reports, which was introduced by OECD countries in CSD IV, should be promoted. (VIII.6)**
5. **The CSD Secretariat should be assisted to make greater use of the opportunities offered by the Internet to provide information on CSD's own Work Programme and on progress in implementing all the Chapters of Agenda 21. (VIII.8)**
6. **National reports to CSD must be prepared well in advance of sessions to allow the Secretariat to produce a useful synthesis drawing out the main lessons. (V.1-8, VIII.9)**
7. **The UN Secretary General should be invited to produce a consolidated annual report on UN efforts to promote sustainable development. (VIII.10)**
8. **The timetable for appointing the Bureau of CSD still needs to be changed so that the new team is installed at the end of each Session and has a year to prepare the session over which it will preside. This question needs to be taken up before UNGASS by the EU in New York. (VIII.11)**
9. **CSD should start its new approach of looking at the socio-economic driving forces of environmental change by considering energy, transport and agriculture. Clear objectives need to be defined before UNGASS if the EU is to succeed in getting its chosen sectors on CSD's Work Programme, since there is likely to be severe competition for the limited time available. This is an area where the Commission and the Member States need to divide up the preparatory work. (V.15, VI.25 & 26, IX.5 & 6)**

10. There are other areas major of major concern. **Oceans, forests (unless UNGASS launches negotiations for a future instrument), and freshwater with a focus on both urban and agricultural issues, and links to soil erosion and food security,** should all be included in the next cycle. (V.14,18, VI.23, IX.8-10)

11. **Trade and Environment, and Investment and the Private Sector** both deserve a high priority in the agenda. In addition to discussion in the context of the economic sectors, there will need to be a general debate on **consumption and production patterns**, notably to draw attention to the implications of long term trends. Work on testing **Indicators** will need review at some time in the cycle. The **legal and institutional questions** proposed for UNEP will need to be brought back to the CSD immediately prior to a further Special Session. (V.9-10, 22, VI.5-7, 11-15, VII.60-63, IX.11-16)

## **V Conclusion**

1. This paper **attempts to set out an achievable list of objectives for the EU at UNGASS.** If all the recommendations made were implemented, Agenda 21 would receive a significant political boost and could complete its transition to the operational phase.

2. **Forests and finance are likely to be the most critical issues at UNGASS.** There should be **agreement on another review** of Agenda 21 in five years time. The Session should also stress the importance of the Third Conference of the Parties of the **Climate Change Convention** and the need for it to complete the Berlin Mandate negotiations.

3. Freshwater, and its connections to soil erosion and food security as well as the urban environment, need increased attention which CSD is well placed to give. The EU has already identified oceans as requiring CSD's integrated approach. The EU also has a strong interest in keeping trade high on CSD's agenda and giving greater prominence to private sector investment. The EU should support the introduction of a sectoral approach in CSD's work.

4. **UNGASS provides a rare opportunity for world leaders to concern themselves with long term issues** rather than immediate crises. Three years before the dawn of a new millenium this is particularly appropriate. There is no doubt that **globalisation and interdependence** will be the hallmarks of the new century and that **these should be the themes for leaders at UNGASS.** Leaders should look back, perhaps not simply to Rio but also to the Stockholm Conference of 1972, and by assessing progress towards sustainability since then, determine the priorities for action now. They should give strong political endorsement to the many fora which are tackling the issues and urge them to move beyond awareness-raising and setting the broad framework of policy, to drawing up operational decisions which will make a real difference to the deteriorating trends in the world's environment. Leaders should stress that the environmental concerns of *all* countries are important to sustainable development. They should also highlight the need for an effective institutional framework at the world level to ensure an integrated approach in which social, economic and environmental concerns all receive proper attention.

5. **Agreement on key priorities and strong and united EU leadership will help to drive forward the negotiations to the benefit of sustainable development, and will be essential to the success of UNGASS.**