

Sustainable Development Goals progress requires monitoring

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Opinion

For the UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved effectively, it is vital that both the EU and Member States monitor progress closely, writes Bogusław Sonik.



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The joint report by the European Parliament's Committees on Development (DEVE) and Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) on implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the EU represents the Parliament's position on progress monitoring in achieving these 17 goals by the EU and its Member States.

The EU has undertaken to submit joint reports in 2019 to complement the voluntary country reviews undertaken by nearly all EU Member States.

The goals, agreed on by all UN Member States in September 2015, constitute part of the 2030 Agenda to deal with, among others, the eradication of poverty, better access to education, access to energy

or action on climate.

From the outset, the EU was heavily involved in the SDG negotiation process and implementation, as many of the goals are linked to obligations and competences set out in EU treaties.

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SDGs are an important innovation within the multilateral UN system, helping eliminate the artificial division between rich, developed countries and poorer ones, that until now these had existed in the previously-agreed Millennium Development Goals.

These Goals embraced a rhetoric of wealthy providers of development helping its poor recipients.

However, in the meantime, global development dynamics have changed enormously, with new economic superpowers emerging - the so-called BRICS countries of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

At the same time the majority of the poorest people live in countries with average incomes; it is these inequalities that SDGs must rebalance.

In accordance with the 2030 Agenda definition, all countries are developing countries and therefore these goals are universal, shared and interlinked.

This has implications for the EU and its Member States at all levels.

In the last four years, EU Member States assumed leadership for overcoming the challenges of implementing SDGs, such as ensuring coherence with other international obligations, setting up indices and monitoring mechanisms for support for developing countries.

Although the EU has achieved numerous successes, its Member States must take cohesive actions on climate, balanced consumption or better education and social integration.

The majority of EU countries have developed - or intend to update - their national development plans in accordance with the SDGs.

In about 50 percent of Member States, these strategies are already fully operational.

“The majority of the poorest people live in countries with average incomes; it is these inequalities that SDGs must rebalance”

They are also introducing numerous innovations that take into account the 17 SDGs in their budgets,

scientific and political cooperation or are setting up platforms for interested parties to contribute to making efforts more effective.

A large majority of Member States have also committed to regular and comprehensive reviews of their implementation, although some have still to do so.

It is vital that the EU encourages all Member States to undertake voluntary national reviews of SDG progress with timely and regular reporting.

Parliament's resolution on the EU's implementation of SDGs, adopted at plenary in March 2019, also contains a reference to an analytical document issued by the Commission at the end of January.

Entitled 'Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030' it sets out three scenarios for how the EU could pursue sustainable development implementation.

The first is the most ambitious and assumes an overarching strategy to achieve these aims, taking into consideration specific deadlines and joint monitoring at the national and EU level.

The second includes aims that fall within the European scope of action, but without binding guidelines and also without Member State coordination.

The third is to maintain the status quo, i.e. the least demanding approach from the point of view of Member States, aimed at concentrating EU efforts on its external actions with marginal actions at national level.

From the EPP Group perspective, only the first scenario could mean progress in relation in the current circumstances.

It is an ambitious and complex scenario and would require a cohesive position of EU Member States on implementation.

"It is vital that the EU encourages all Member States to undertake voluntary national reviews of SDG progress with timely and regular reporting"

However, if we are to act as global leaders, we must be both ambitious and self-critical.

We must have tools to assess the actions we undertake if we are to adapt European policies to achieve the aims of the Agenda.

It seems that the key task, and at the same time a challenge, for the European Commission is a gap analysis of the existing political strategies and their implementation.

This will define the most pressing areas where there is lack of cohesion lie as well as developing the framework for monitoring and review of the different goals from the point of view of the EU and its Member States.

SDGs can be achieved only where comprehensive strategies have been developed and incorporated into both internal and external EU policies as well as in the management mechanisms.

This, of course, will be a task for the new European Commission to set up after the elections and for the new European Parliament, whose composition will be known in early June.

The new College of Commissioners would have to stress an approach based on multilevel governance, including active and wide-ranging citizen, civic organisations and private sector involvement.

About the author



Bogusław Sonik (PL, EPP) is shadow rapporteur on the implementation and delivery of sustainable development

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