

## EEAC, the Way Ahead in the Light of the Last Five Years

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At our annual plenary session of the European Environment and sustainable development councils held in Bordeaux in October 2008, we as representatives of national environmental and sustainable development councils decided to give our view on the financial situation in the context of our statement on "Sustaining Europe for a long way ahead". We were discussing that statement which was prepared before the major crisis had become clear. So we decided to address ourselves to the president of the Council of Europe and to our national governments. And for a reason:

We firmly believe that the principles and practices of sustainable development must be placed at the heart of any package of solutions. We noted that amongst the root causes of the current situation is the unsustainable growth in resource consumption, which has contributed to rising and currently highly unstable prices of basic commodities of energy, food and water. These fall especially harshly on the poor. At the same time, the deregulated creation of credit, debt, and risky financial assets has fuelled a form of economic growth which cannot be sustained.

Of course we were afraid that in the present circumstances there is a strong temptation to put sustainable development on the back burner. We saw those signs not only in Polish government circles. We strongly feel that this would be very dangerous for the reliability of any future economy. For example any temptation to abandon or dilute the European Union Climate and Energy Package could lead to more of the very economic and social instabilities which are currently being addressed. The Stern Report has shown that the costs of trying to adapt too late to climate change far exceed the costs of early mitigation.

So we therefore urged the European Union not to give way on any aspect of the current climate and energy package, because of fears about the impact on energy prices and of the perceived need to guarantee energy security.

We also requested that in seeking to restore the basic functions of the financial markets and the

revitalisation of the economy, the EU shall grasp the opportunity to stimulate innovation, environmentally sound technology, and new sustainability-promoting enterprises, so that a wide range of new jobs and skills is developed. This is particularly important in order to ensure that those who may otherwise be impoverished by the present crises can gain a secure means of earning a living.

In the past years EEAC has addressed several major concerns that are of importance for almost every member country of the EU. This has led to constructive discussions in both international and national surroundings. As a network organisation of national advisory councils, EEAC is not a lobby organisation for specific interests or values. Balance within the context of widely accepted societal values and the use and interpretation of scientific knowledge are key for the identity of the organization.

**EEAC's internal goal is to make the advisory work of its member and partner councils more effective and efficient by exchanging information and help set priorities in the context of European environmental and nature protection policies, strategies and developments. The network and its members and partners support decision makers in adopting and applying a more sustainable concept of development.**

The network wants to maintain its credibility and authority in relation to the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament by providing impartial statements and discuss these timely with the Commissions representatives. Its interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder and nationally rooted member and partner councils provide the potential to be an influential environment and sustainability "think-tank" in Europe. As such, EEAC could serve as a crucial interface between science and policy development.

In the past years EEAC addressed the EU Presidency, the Commission and national governments with advice ("Statements") on mostly actual political items. So in September 2007 a major advice on energy efficiency was agreed: "Energy efficiency,

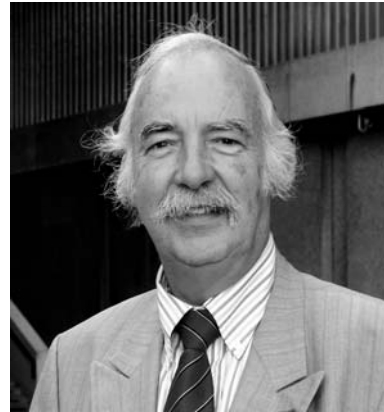
key pillar for a competitive, secure and environmentally friendly European Energy policy." In 2006 PROS organized an important EEAC conference on forestry and education, meant to deliver input in the governments conference on the sustainable forestry policies a year later. The outlines of a future European policy were sketched at that conference. In the years before we presented ideas and advices on themes and issues like: Impact assessments of European Commission Policies (2006 in the light of the failed assessment procedures around Reach), on rural policies for Europe and on biodiversity conservation and the adaptation to the impacts of climate change (2005 in the light of the CAP reform), and about the marine strategy in 2004.

The strength of the EEAC network and its members relates mainly to the scientific integrity and independence from political influence of the member councils. In daily practice we have adopted a selective work mode and strong mechanisms to prioritise by establishing working groups of national councils on the main themes of European developments. These working groups are the backbone of the network, they are also the producers of statements. We try to combine a high ambition and capacity to respond to medium and long-term key challenges with the courage and forum to debate controversial topics. We like to approach issues with a truly pan-European perspective and representation and a clear picture of Europe's role in global politics and international partners with common goals.

To contribute to ongoing and planned policies at EU level and to in the longer run help set the political agenda, EEAC needs to be timely and selective. This is achieved by: regularly conducted 'horizon scanning' and the usage of broader forward looks by other organizations; prioritizing on the basis of an internally produced forward looking paper. EEAC wants to keep the SD agenda visible and the environmental dimension strong, by drafting alternative paths for the future and being ready, when windows of opportunity open. We also look for opportunities for a constructive dialogue with economic players, and the incidental cooperation with EESC should be developed in the future.

The value of advisory councils is sometimes underestimated, so the decision of the European Council on the now existing European sustainable development strategy that national governments should consider the establishment of SD councils was of great importance. Especially members of parliament should profit immensely from the availability of independent advice. Many major problems of today could be addressed better with the balanced input of scientists and stakeholders. Let us hope that EEAC will continue to pave the way for such an approach.

## About the Author



**Frans Willem Rudolph Evers, LLM**, is deputy-chairman of the Dutch Commission for environmental impact assessment and a member of the RMNO, the Advisory Council for research on Spatial planning, nature and the environment. Since 2004 he is chairman of the Steering Committee of EEAC, the Network of European Environment and Sustainable development Advisory Councils.

He is chairman of the independent National Contact Point for the OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises. Evers is adjunct-professor at Tias, the Tilburg University's business school.

Former Executive-president and cofounder (1994-2006) of the Sustainability Challenge Foundation, a not for profit educational organization that focuses on creating ways to sustainable development as a result of well-designed consensus-building processes ([www.SCFoundation.org](http://www.SCFoundation.org)). The SCF International programs on the management of sustainability (IPMS) in The Netherlands are well known in many parts of the world. Almost 500 people from 70 different countries participated. The program is also available as Regional PMS and was executed in countries like Kenya, Moldova, Mozambique, South Africa, Senegal and Turkey. Evers was head of faculty in the Moldova and Turkey programs.

Frans Evers was since 1996 CEO of "Natuurmonumenten", the large membership nature conservation organisation in the Netherlands, from which he retired in 2002.

From 1983 till 1996 he worked at the Ministry for Housing, spatial planning and environment, from 1987 as Director-general for the Government buildings agency, from 1983 as deputy Director-general for the environment.

He was visiting lecturer at MIT in 1995 and he published a book on the management of public real estate.

From 1974 in the Ministry for Health and Environmental protection he was responsible for the development of noise protection legislation and, as a director, for environmental planning, environmental impact assessment, risk assessment and modernisation and deregulation of environmental legislation in general. From 1971 till 1974 he was a lawyer at the Civil Aviation Authority.

Frans Evers chaired international working groups and committees (UN and OECD) and is an often invited speaker in national and international conferences. He lectured at Universities of Tilburg, Wageningen, Groningen, Rotterdam, Southern California and Ljubljana and at MIT and Tuft's University.

He has several responsibilities as an advisor to companies and as a policy mediator for local and regional governments. He has also responsibilities in several not for profit organisations.