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**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ON THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN  
BY THE EU**

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*“We spend billions of dollars trying to understand the origins of the universe, while we still don’t understand the conditions for a stable society, a functioning economy or peace”*

Dirk Helbing

## Introduction

Imagine having three options in front of you. On the left there is social progress. At the centre the environmental protection. On the right, economic development. It is true, each option chosen individually would lead to positive results for the future that we would like if we imagined a better world.

However, each of these three options, if taken alone and to the detriment of the others, also has strong limits. Therefore, if we want to look at a future that contemplates all three options available, we must absolutely try to reach a synthesis between the three options in the field. It is necessary to abandon the logic according to which the environment, economy and society are not inextricably dependent on each other and understand that our planet has finite natural resources and its carrying capacity is limited. Nowadays, almost all scientists believe that the current model of economic growth based on consumerism and short-term profit generates serious environmental risks and social problems. In this context, it is therefore necessary to rethink a new development project that ensures a more extensive and inclusive well-being. In this regard, the concept of Sustainable Development would seem to be the only model able to summarize the three options available to us and translate the needs of our time into an alternative socio-economic paradigm that can ensure well-being for all and resilience for the biosphere towards the impacts of human activities and a consumption of natural resources compatible with their long-term availability, in order to preserve the planet for present and future generations. The awareness of the urgent need for an alternative vision of development has become essential to face an unprecedented challenge in the history of humanity in guaranteeing the current 7.6 billion human beings and - the 9 billion expected in 2050 - the natural resources from depends on our existence, the quality of life and our well-being.

The growing attention to the urgency of pursuing a Sustainable Development has launched a profound revision process in the last decade, which concerns the political agendas of all the governments of the world. It is an awareness in the institutional sphere in order to reformulate the organizational models and create new tools to approach the problems of the whole current development model within the space of construction of global governance.

This work originated from the internship experience held in Brussels at the EASME (Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises), an agency of the European Commission. Through the LUISS Guido Carli University, I had the opportunity to catapult

myself into the European dimension of planning in terms of Sustainable Development. In the Agency of the European Commission, alternating a horizontal research work, with a vertical work of analysis and data processing, I was able to acquire knowledge related to the industrial energy efficiency program. In addition, I was able to concretely observe the parameters for evaluating the efficiency and validity of project funding under the Life and H2020 programs. This experience has allowed me to understand closely how the European Union is facing the challenges of the globalization process and in particular the energy and environmental issues, essential to understand its commitment to pursuing Community policies and initiatives for Sustainable Development.

The imperative of sustainability has led the EU to develop a set of tools and indicators to monitor progress. In fact, the dissemination of indicators, methods and models is essential to support decision-making processes in environmental matters and economic development. In this sense, over the past few years, the EU has developed considerable action demonstrating its willingness to take up the challenge of sustainability, an objective that can no longer be avoided and has become a reference point in which to incite the policies and initiatives of the different government levels.

In this scenario, this work represents an attempt to retrace, from a historical perspective, the critical aspects of the evolution of the international debate on the concept of sustainable development, analyzing the path taken by the EU in pursuing Sustainable Development. With this in mind, through the historical reconstruction of the main world conferences concerning the theme of Sustainable Development and the criticality of the many social, economic and environmental aspects related to it, emphasis is given to understanding the progress of the European Union's contribution in order to pursue Sustainable Development.

It is worth recalling that the concept of Sustainable Development is introduced for the first time in the Our Common Future Report (known as the Brundtland Report), issued in 1987 by the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The document defines as sustainable that “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*<sup>1</sup>”. The notion of sustainability, outlined in the Report, was linked to the compatibility between the development of economic activities and environmental protection, introducing the question of intergenerational and intragenerational fairness. The principle of

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development A/42/427 - *Our Common Future*. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/milestones/wced>

Sustainable Development foresaw that the richer countries would adopt productive processes and lifestyles compatible with the capacity of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities and that developing countries could grow in demographic and economic terms at rates compatible with the ecosystem. This definition of Sustainable Development, from that moment on, set in motion a social agenda that would consider relations between development and the environment on a global scale, paying particular attention to the political and economic aspects. The principle of Sustainable Development has been associated with topics such as population, food security, species extinctions, energy, industry, the urban question, which represent the collective challenges. These themes could be addressed through common efforts, whose main working directions concerned the management of international common goods, the connection between peace, security, development and the environment, the need for institutional and social changes.

Prior to the Brundtland Report, in the seventies the debate began on environmental issues. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, which, together with the Brundtland Report will be described in the second chapter of this work, marked a turning point in the development of international environmental policy. The Declaration approved by the Heads of the 110 participating delegations highlighted the importance of the defense and improvement of the environment which have become an imperative aim for humanity to be pursued together with the fundamental goals of peace and of world economic and social development. This is the first international document that recognizes the protection of the environment as one of the priority objectives for humanity and represents a point of reference for the adoption of environmental protection measures, in particular those related to the climate and the definition of the stages in Sustainable Development. The 26 principles contained in this first international document focus on social well-being and protection of the environmental heritage, according to a criterion of fair distribution of resources, also in the face of future generations. Following the Conference, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was established, which is one of the most important references for Sustainable Development at world level, together with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUNC).

The historical perspective of the concept of Sustainable Development will notice a crucial *momentum* at the end of the last century, during the Earth Summit, the first world conference of Heads of State on the environment. Such historic perspective is complemented



by the third chapter that offers an analysis of the critical aspects of sustainability starting from the first Rio conference and in parallel, the measures adopted in Europe in relation to the evolution of the themes concerning Sustainable Development are observed. Indeed, in 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, called Earth Summit, consolidated the concept of Sustainable Development. The two fundamental elements around which reflection was articulated are the environment, as an essential dimension of economic development, and intergenerational responsibility in the use of human resources. The Conference was attended by 172 Governments, 108 Heads of State and 2,400 representatives of non-governmental organizations that endorse Agenda 21, a global action program to be undertaken at national and local level in all sectors of Sustainable Development. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development focused on the environment, on the economy and on society and, reaffirming the rules established at the Stockholm Conference, enunciated the 27 principles on the rights and responsibilities of nations in the pursuit of development and human well-being. Furthermore, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was approved with the aim of preserving biodiversity and the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNCCC) aimed at stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions at a level that would not endanger the global climate. In order to ensure effective follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) was established by the UN, subsequently replaced by a High-level Political Forum nominated in 2012 by the United Nations Development Conference Sustainable. The progress achieved five years after the definition of Agenda 21 was evaluated in 1997 during the Earth Summit+5. On this occasion the growing interest in the multiple aspects related to Sustainable Development was emphasized, but at the same time the persistence of disparities in the achievement of the established objectives was highlighted. This delay is attributable to the phenomenon of globalization, which has led to an imbalance between countries in which poverty levels have been reduced and others in which there has been a deterioration in socio-economic conditions. Indigence, low levels of social development, inadequate infrastructure, lack of capital have prevented these poor countries from planning concrete actions to pursue Sustainable Development. In this context, the need arose for international support to operate in a spirit of extended partnership, in order to integrate sustainability into all social aspects and make it inclusive for every level of governance. This requirement is confirmed by the Millennium Summit, held in New York in 2000, in which the Heads of State and Government sign the Millennium Declaration. Among the fundamental values enshrined in the document, was mentioned the respect for nature, which provides for

prudence in the management of all living species and natural resources; unsustainable production and development models must be transformed in accordance with the precepts of Sustainable Development. To this end, eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established, which committed the 193 signatory states to achieve them by 2015, including eradicating extreme poverty and world hunger; to make primary education universal, to promote gender equality and women's autonomy; reduce infant mortality and maternal mortality; fight AIDS, malaria and other diseases; guarantee environmental sustainability; form a global partnership for development. In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, reiterated the attention to the new challenges to be faced in order to achieve Sustainable Development: a model of development that would combine economic, social and environmental aspects and able to ensure a fairer and more prosperous society respecting future generations. At the centre of the reflection there were the relevant issues highlighted during the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit and the state of implementation of the decisions taken. The result was a Plan of Implementation, signed by the 191 participating States, which identifies key issues for the next decade. The final document continued to focus on the eradication of poverty, on changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, on the protection and management of natural resources.

The fourth chapter traces the most recent phase of the advancement of the world's commitment to Sustainable Development, particularly the European Union.

Twenty years after the Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), Rio+20, was held again in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 with the aim of renewing the political commitment to Sustainable Development, verifying the state of implementation of the international responsibilities assumed in the last two decades and channel the efforts of governments and civil society towards common objectives and new challenges to face. The Conference focused attention on two aspects. The first concerned the need to move towards a green economy to reduce the risks associated with global threats, among which the most alarming was that of climate change, which were the cause and consequences of other worrying phenomena including the loss of biodiversity, desertification and depletion of natural resources. In order to promote social and economic well-being it was necessary to create an institutional framework for Sustainable Development, a global governance capable of including all institutions and actors responsible for developing, monitoring and implementing policies.

In this context of global action for the definition of an international institutional framework, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted in September 2015 the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which are outlined at global level the guidelines of activities for the coming years that each state is strongly obliged to consider in the formulation of its internal policies. In the same year, in line with the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Climate Agreement was also adopted. The implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that constitute the 2030 Agenda is addressed to different areas of social, economic and environmental development that must be considered in an integrated vision. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development still represents the United Nations global action plan for people, the planet and prosperity, with the aim of achieving a sustainable transformation of society, economy and environment for 2030.

In this regard, the last chapter of this work is dedicated to figure out the current situation of our country – as an EU member state – with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals indicated by 2030 Agenda by means of the ASviS Report 2018 which perfectly portrays the situation of Italy with respect to the SDGs.



# CHAPTER ONE

## Sustainable Development in time and space

### *I. Preliminary considerations*

When we look at the history of humanity, the relationship between the two most complex systems on Earth, human society and nature, is omnipresent. Failure to respect the natural balance has always led to irreparable losses. When we talk about saving the environment, in a certain sense it is imprecise, because the environment will continue to exist, while the human species would risk not surviving or we might have to do it in a world in which we would not want to live. Human beings today are at a critical point in history, we have become leaders of the biological community, but we are causing the destruction of the foundations of the vital system that gave us birth.

If we were looking for the cause of planet destruction, what would we get to? We would come to a global civilization that was created by the human mind, a mind that has evolved so much that it allows us to reflect on ourselves and to analyze our existence, capable of discovering quantum physics, exploring space and scrutinizing within the DNA. However, despite our exceptional intellectual and technological achievements, we are witnessing the large-scale impact that our actions produce on the planet, since life on Earth is only possible because a certain number of parameters are placed within very narrow limits.

It is not surprise that we live in an era that is both fascinating and terrible. Fascinating because never before now, the future of Planet Earth is above all in our hands; what will take place tomorrow will depend largely on what the human community will or will not do today. Terrible because our generation is the first, since the human species has appeared on Earth, to compromise irreparably what could exist in the future of our planet. Overtime, human beings have been interacting with the natural world since they appeared on Earth, and they have overwhelmed their ability to influence the change in natural environments. Having been the human mind to create the concept of the future, we were the only animals on the planet that could understand and influence the future with the actions of the present. However, it is only recently that the human species is rapidly and profoundly intervening on the cycles of the entire biosphere.

In this sense, man has not only refined his ability to adapt to the different natural environments on Earth but has changed the environments themselves in a very short time. Nowadays, there is no place in the biosphere, where human intervention has not arrived in some way, directly or indirectly. The authentic environmental upheavals that man's activity has produced and continues to produce cannot but reign over our own survival abilities as they lead to an overall diminution of the planet's capacity to meet our needs. Because of our activities, we are destroying natural environments that are fundamental for the equilibrium of our planet, consolidated over millions of years of evolution: we intervene with actions of all kinds in the delicate cycles of nature jeopardizing the survival of many living species. By acting in this way, we daily cause a constant decrease in the natural capacity of the Earth to bear the quantitative and qualitative impact of the human species.

Moreover, the problems of pollution, the accumulation of waste, the impoverishment of raw materials, the search for alternative sources of energy and the disappearance of habitats and natural species have profoundly modified the natural environment so much that it is, for ecological characteristics, very different from the primitive one and, even worse, they have transformed it to such an extent as to make it more and more hostile to the optimal living conditions essential for living organisms, including human beings. These problems, which have become vitally important in recent years, were highlighted for the first time since the 1960s, when the American biologist and zoologist Rachel Carson published “*Silent Spring*”, a work that generated profound reflections in the society of the time.

These are the words of Rachel Carson in 1962, expressing all his regret for man's unconscious behaviour towards the environment and his idea of progress, a lethal weapon for nature, animals and all humanity:

*Over increasingly large areas of the United States, spring now comes unheralded by the return of the birds, and the early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song. This sudden silencing of the song of birds, this obliteration of the colour and beauty and interest they lend to our world have come about swiftly, insidiously, and unnoticed by those whose communities are as yet unaffected<sup>2</sup>.*

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<sup>2</sup> CARSON R., *Silent Spring*, 1962, pag.116.

*"Silent Spring"* came as a cry in the wilderness, a heartfelt treatise that represented a significant critique of the industrialized world and governments; for the first time the environmental problem was posed, and the dangers of chemical substances were accused. This work, recognized as the foundation of the environmental movement, markedly changed the course of history, highlighting issues that until then had never been taken into consideration.

The protection of the Earth and the biosphere, the protection of natural habitats, cultural and environmental heritage, were unknown subjects by the governments of the various countries, since they were not even included in political agendas. Unfortunately, the failure to take account of these important problems has led, over time, to the occurrence of environmental disasters and irreversible changes on our planet. The increasing and indiscriminate exploitation of the environment by the industrialized countries has been imposed following the exaltation of the domination of man over nature and other living species in a confident vision towards a continuous progress of skills and techniques aimed at production and satisfaction of needs.

In fact, the breaking point between human society and nature occurred with the advent of industrialization that has consolidated the founding paradigm of economic activities in the western world since the eighteenth century. A paradigm, based on the civilization of consumption, which has dramatically increased the amount of waste produced and not recyclable naturally and in which environmental pollution appears to be the most evident effect of human activity since we abandoned the previous ways and rhythms of life that were regenerative, and nature was converted to a resource seen essentially as inexhaustible.

The question of the exploitation of natural resources is today a theme of fundamental centrality and involves not only the rich countries, the main consumers, but the entire geosystem. Nature seen as an inexhaustible resource has led to the conception that is at the basis of the distorted idea of progress we have believed for centuries and which results in unlimited growth and expansion. The nefarious consumption of natural resources, including that of soil, has led to a loss of biodiversity with extinctions of many species, serious damage to forests and marine environments, and caused loss of fertile soil and air and water pollution.

Until the discovery of fossil fuels, the world's population has never exceeded one billion. Moreover, by means of the agricultural revolution, the world population has progressively grown up to a billion people. The transition from one billion to two billion people, however, did not take 100,000 years, but only 130 years. In 1960, the world population was about 3 billion, up to the current 7.6 billion. The world population has increased exponentially, and energy consumption has increased at the same pace. The fossil fuels precisely, which, accumulated over millions of years are nowadays burning in very short time

and in large quantities, generating huge volumes of carbon dioxide that is changing the climate of the planet. The era of dependence on fossil fuels has triggered a sequence of events that has led to today's environmental crisis. Extreme weather events caused by climate change are causing economic damage and huge social costs. In some areas of the planet, climate change is undermining local agricultural production, fuelling substantial flows of environmental migrants expected to rise sharply in the coming years.

From these beliefs, I think it is more relevant than ever to resume the discussion on the concept of development, still based on infinite growth and on an anachronistic indicator (GDP) that represents the fundamental yardstick of a country's progress. Maximizing GDP, continues to be the main objective of economic policies, neglecting all distributional considerations and other dimensions of well-being and quality of life. An unsustainable environmental model, which assumes that it has sufficient material resources to fuel an infinite growth in consumption on which the satisfaction of human needs depends.

The development should have improved our living conditions respecting the limits of the planet, creating an economy based on sustainable human development in a limited ecological space and instead, as is evident, the idea of development in which we have believed and on which we have founded our socio-economic paradigm during the last centuries, has favoured the growth of economic activities, but also maintained areas of unemployment and large social groups of poverty that led to an increasing inequality and strong social unease, not counting the environmental impact and the catastrophic consequences that have ensued for ecosystems, for living organisms and in terms of climate change.

Human development therefore cannot be traced back to the sole economic dimension. On our planet, where billions of inhabitants live, will increase in the coming decades and will be increasingly connected by computer networks, by the media and by mobility. The current increasingly globalized production and consumption models will have less and less sustainable environmental and social impact and unfortunately, time is not an irrelevant variable for the dynamics underway. As human beings we cannot precisely predict the future, but we know the past; in previous centuries we did not know what we were altering and nowadays we are experiencing this 'revenge of nature' after about 200 years of industrial revolution. It is evident now that industrial civilization has caused irreparable damage and our pressure on the planet is increasing more and more.

We have, in the last decades, committed the mistake of neglecting the multiple alarms launched by climate changes, doing very little to fight them by refusing to consider the environmental and social unsustainability of our development model and voluntarily choosing



not to understand the interdependence of the factors economic, social, environmental and institutional.

However, although it has been understood that it is necessary to implement a change of course, in the current global economic system, consumerism seems to be the point of arrival of our civilization. We could almost speak of a 'democracy' of the consumer, in the sense that each state must provide its citizens with consumer goods, bringing comfort to be cultural symbol allowing the corporations to become the dominant institutional model of our era and what we are facing today is their possibility to bankrupt the planet because of their irresponsible exploitation of resources. If we thought our global economic system based on consumerism as a disease, we would realize that climate changes are just the symptoms of the disease. The real problem is rather cultural because the germ of such disease is rooted in consumerism, the logical result of a global socio-economic system that motivates people to accumulate unlimited wealth, power and resources. Therefore, it would be fundamental to change the underlying principle of unlimited expansion, to move from the idea of having to the idea of well-being, which would represent a radical cultural change. Humanity must acquire the awareness of the global forces that influence our lives, to provide future generations with a system that we can count on to live. Since the forces that are annihilating the planet are created by men, the human being himself can be the foundation of the solution, and the generation of the era we are living in can truly change the world. In this fundamental phase of human history, the problems generated by industrial society are the task of all. Our intervention must reflect our awareness as a species to deliver the planet to future generations.

If we reflect on why almost nothing has been done to avoid today's environmental crisis and guarantee future generations to meet their needs, we will certainly realize that, among the many reasons, possibly the effort to tighten education and climate change turns out to be a mistake. In this sense, from a conceptual point of view, making climate change and consequently sustainable development as a scientific and academic concept, it represents a failure in communication because these problems have been posed as an abstract remote phenomenon from everyday life. In fact, it can be noted that the use of terminology concerning the word sustainability has increased and it seems legitimate to think that this increase represents, from a certain point of view, an abuse. Therefore, the concept of Sustainable Development has been weakened by an often banal use, sometimes even instrumental and in substantial continuity with the current socio-economic development model.

The question we should ask is, how can we use our scientific and technological knowledge together with our historical experience to create a culture and a socio-economic model that interacts with the surrounding world in a sustainable way?

Regardless of my personal reflections, if we wanted to translate numerically the unsustainability of the current socio-economic system, it would be enough to summarize the state of the world in some data. We could observe that in the world almost 800 million people are in a condition of extreme poverty and a similar number of people is undernourished, that 60 million people live in a condition of slavery, which over 400 million were affected by natural disasters in 2016, that 1% of the population owns 50% of the world's wealth, which 700 million people do not have access to clean water<sup>3</sup>.

For these reasons, find an answer to avoid the collapse of our planet's ecosystems and the search for solutions to create a sustainable future is the greatest challenge of our time. Needless to hide: we are facing an epochal passage in our history and considering future risks, the right thing to do is to decide to commit even more for designing and creating a utopia, where the only and stubborn direction to take is that for which social, economic, environmental and institutional equity and social sustainability, become a practice to construct a new paradigm of human development that respects planetary limits. Sustainable development, in this sense, is the only paradigm that sees in the conversion of the current model of production, consumption and organization of society the best opportunity to avoid the risks of the collapse of the current socio-economic system, which are been recognized as real by the political leaders of the UN countries.

The task we are facing is not so much environmental as it is political since environmental problems do not respect national borders.

In this respect, the desire to direct the course of events towards a new direction seems to have been launched on September 25, 2015, the day in which the Heads of State and Government of the 193 countries that are part of the UN have recognized the unsustainability of the current development model, and by signing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, have officially adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 SDGs, proposed with the aim of expressing the collective imagination and representing the reference framework of development policies in the coming years, are an operational translation of the idea of human development.

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<sup>3</sup> GIOVANNINI E., *L'Utopia Sostenibile*, 2018, Laterza, pag. vi.

At least from a point of view of intent, they seem to sanction the definitive overcoming of economic growth as single indicator and objective of development policies. The need for a universal reference framework for Sustainable Development, calls for a demanding horizon based on the convergence and integration of economic development, social development and environmental protection.<sup>4</sup> These three dimensions cannot be considered independently or pursued through objectives that are unrelated to each other, as they are inseparable and co-essential to a path of overall sustainability. In other words, it is necessary to get out of the illusion that it is possible to solve the problems of defining a model of production, consumption and exchange (economic sustainability), without worrying about whether this comes into collision with the biophysical limits of the Earth (environmental sustainability) or if a significant proportion of the world's population remains excluded from the enjoyment of the benefits of economic development (social sustainability). In recent years, the awareness of how the interrelations between the different elements represent a constraint, has increased considerably. A consolidated scientific approach to the limits of the planet elaborates an articulation through the concept of "safe operating space for humanity"<sup>5</sup>, identified on the basis of the processes that regulate the stability of the Earth system. Integrity of the biosphere system and climate changes thus, emerge as central elements of a set of indicators that define the limits of the planet within a framework of strong interrelation and interdependence<sup>6</sup>.

Today more than ever, we need to be able to tell a new story about the new opportunities that humanity has to open new paths to a better future, that is the bearer of a positive message capable of giving hope. To believe that it is impossible to pursue an alternative to the current unsustainable growth model while remaining indifferent to grasping the greatest challenge of our age is what reassures us but at the same time condemns us. We can provide a vision of a better future, the climate crisis might just give us an opportunity to create a healthier and more equitable world.

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<sup>4</sup> DREXHAGE J., MURPHY D., *Sustainable Development: From Brundtland to Rio 2012*, United Nations, New York, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> the hydrologist Johan Rockström in 2009 developed the model of "planetary boundaries" at the Stockholm Resilience Center with his team. Rockström observes nine subsystems in the earth system: climate change, loss of biodiversity, variation of the biogeochemical cycle of nitrogen and phosphorus, acidification of the oceans, consumption of soil and water, reduction of the ozone layer in the stratosphere, diffusion of aerosols into the atmosphere and chemical pollution; and assuming a "safe operating space" came to the conclusion that for three subsystems (climate change, biodiversity and nitrogen cycle) we have already exceeded the threshold. Limits are the minimum levels of a positive process below which an irreversible environmental degradation is triggered, while the highest are the socially desirable levels for sustainability.

<sup>6</sup> STEFFEN W. ET AL., <<Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet>>, in Science, retrieved at <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/1259855>

## II. Origins and definition

Although this idea of development has only spread in recent years, the roots of Sustainable Development understood as a concern for the protection of natural resources, go back to less recent times.

In the attempt to trace the conceptual seed of sustainable development, we should in fact go back to the end of the Middle Ages, namely the *Cantico delle Creature* of 1224, the prayer in which St. Francis addresses the Lord with praise for the moon, the sun, the stars and the animals and for the generosity of the earth: <<*Laudato si' mi' signore per sora nostra madre terra, la quale ne sustenta et governa...*>><sup>7</sup>. Another conceptual trace can be found in Nuremberg in 1294, the place where the first *Ordinance of Forests* was issued<sup>8</sup>, which ordered trees to be cut at such a pace as to allow forests to re-grow. About five centuries later, in 1713, a Saxon nobleman, Hans Carl von Carlowitz, published a work entitled *Sylvicultura oeconomica, oder haußwirthliche Nachricht und Naturmäßige Anweisung zur wilden Baum-Zucht*<sup>9</sup>, in which the author asked for a rigorous program of reforestation, in view of an increase in future production but also speaks of thermal isolation in the construction of buildings and low absorption melting furnaces, with a view to reducing consumption. The idea was consolidated at the end of the eighteenth century, exactly in 1795, when Georg Ludwig Hartig, redeemed concretely in the work *Anweisung zur Taxation der Forste oder zur Bestimmung des Holzertrags der Wälder...etc*<sup>10</sup>, what he had learned in the course of his university studies concerning the cutting of trees that should have conformed to the growth rate and had to taking into account also the needs of future generations. Even if not formalized, this notion appears to be the first definition of sustainable development. At that time, however, the application of the idea of Sustainable Development remained limited to silviculture and did not spread to other human activities.

A few decades earlier, the Industrial Revolution began in England. By means of inventions such as the spinning machine, the mechanical loom and the steam machine, the muscular energy of man was replaced by mechanical energy and within a century by electricity,

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<sup>7</sup> “Cantico delle Creature of 1224”

Retrieved at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

<sup>8</sup> HELD M., *Geschichte der Nachhaltigkeit. Natur und Kultur*, 1(1):17–31, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> VON CARLOWITZ H.C., HAMBERGER J., *Sylvicultura oeconomica, oder haußwirthliche Nachricht und Naturmäßige Anweisung zur wilden Baum-Zucht*, Munchen, Oekom Verlag, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> HARTIG G.L., *Anweisung zur Taxation der Forste oder zur Bestimmung des Holzertrags der Wälder...etc.*, Gießen, 1795.

more easily transportable and distributable. The advent of the Industrial Revolution will mark the importance of the time taken to punctuate the pace of work and it will have the effect of accentuating the gap between rich and poor, favoring the proliferation of the first social revolts due to the exhausting amount of working hours. The Industrial Revolution had already been preceded by a continuous and strong expansion of the economy and commerce that began in the sixteenth century with the conquest of the American continent that led to the increase and acceleration of economic exchanges. The environmental impact that ensued, mainly due to the emissions of carbon dioxide and the massive use of oil has progressively reached gigantic proportions in the course of the 20th century.

In 1798, the economist Robert Malthus was probably the first to recognize the concept of limited resources of the planet in his famous essay<sup>11</sup> on the world population. He argued that, if the population grows exponentially and faster than the availability of food, and if food production grows in a linear manner, population growth would have pushed to cultivate lands that are less fertile, resulting in a shortage of kinds of food subsistence and in the arrest of economic development. The theme of the excessive exploitation of natural resources will find its most evident manifestation in colonial domination processes.

Meanwhile, the Scottish economist Adam Smith, considered the father of political economy, identified the origins of capitalism in the principle that the wealth of nations derives from individual wealth and the individual's need to be enriched to merit social approval, and with the French Revolution of 1789, a rich bourgeoisie had consolidated and found an abundant source to feed itself in the development of the Industrial Revolution, forgetting about the essentiality of preserving natural resources for future generations. Besides, during the French Revolution, the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* will be elaborated, containing a list of fundamental rights of the individual and of the citizen, in which these rights were defined <<*droits naturels, inaliénables et sacrés*<sup>12</sup>>>.

Two centuries after the publication of the famous essay, the debate raised by the doctrines of Malthus is far from dormant and the problem of the growth of the world population is still very timely. The accelerated increase in population throughout the twentieth century indicates that the exponential model of population growth is incredibly consistent with reality and proposes again, in all its timeliness and drama, the thesis of the English economist. Since

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<sup>11</sup> MALTHUS T.R., *Essay on the principle of population*, London, John Murray, C. Roworth, 1826.

<sup>12</sup> *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*. Retrieved at <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/le-bloc-de-constitutionnalite/declaration-des-droits-de-l-homme-et-du-citoyen-de-1789>

the 1960s<sup>13</sup>, complaints about the degradation of the planet grew and the increasing awareness of having to change the cultural paradigm at the base of modern Western societies begin to question the meaning of well-being, the quality of life, problems of overcrowding and pollution of cities. The alarmism regarding the scarcity and exhaustion of natural resources was associated with the accelerated increase in the population criticized by the doctrines of Malthus.

Over the decades, the perpetual attempt to propose alternative economic development models and to construct a general theory aimed at making economic processes compatible with environmental balances has found its paradigm in Sustainable Development, which has thus become a key concept of modern policies. With the notion of sustainable development, for the first time the approach has shifted to a unitary interpretation of economic and natural systems<sup>14</sup>. Although it does not yet possess a solid theoretical body, there is no shortage of thinking that the notion of Sustainable Development is a radical change in the way society is conceived and developed and the best opportunity to reconcile three historically antithetical and apparently incompatible objectives: economic development, social progress and environmental protection.

The concept of Sustainable Development is still the subject of theoretical developments and insights, especially with regard to the practical implications of economic policy. However, a question on which no doubt is raised concerns the attempt to define a program to bring the world economy on a path of sustainable development, which inevitably involves the change of some of the pillars of theory and economic practice such as preference of the present with respect to the future and more respect to the less.

What appears evident, despite the abundant literary production on the subject, is that the numerous contributions treat the problem only in a general and descriptive way<sup>15</sup>, inducing public opinion to a confusing conception on the meaning of sustainable development. Although many authors recognize a paradigmatic validity to the concept of sustainable development, in reality there is no convergence on a sufficiently unambiguous definition of what is meant by this expression<sup>16</sup>. This distortion of meaning depends partly on the heterogeneous and

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<sup>13</sup> the cry of alarm will be launched thanks to the contribution of the biologist Rachel Carson in his book *Silent Spring*, mentioned above.

<sup>14</sup> CONTI S., *Geografia Economica*, Torino, Utet, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> TISDELL C., *Environmental Economics: Policies for Environmental Management and Sustainable Development*, Cheltenham (UK), Edward Elgar Publ., 1993.

<sup>16</sup> PEARCE D., MARKANDYA A., BARBIER E., *Blueprint for a Green Economy*, London, Earthscan Publ., 1989 (trad. it. Progetto per una economia verde, Firenze, Il Mulino, 1991), they have counted 25 different definitions of sustainable development. PEZZEY J., *Sustainability: An Interdisciplinary guide*, Environmental Values, 1, 1993, pp. 321-62, contains another collection of definitions. O'RIORDAN T., *The Challenge for Environmentalism*, in R. Peet, N. Thrift (eds.), *New Models in Geography: The Political-Economic Perspective. I Human Geography. Mathematical Models*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 77-101, stresses that the remarkable ambiguity of the term sustainable development is at the same time a point of weakness and strength.

multidisciplinary approach, which presupposes a radical change in the definition of priorities and contents of socio-economic and environmental policies.

An important first consequence of the introduction of the concept of Sustainable Development is to have clarified the terminological difference between 'growth' and 'development' that have substantially different economic meanings. Synthetically, growth means in fact the increase, usually measured on a quantitative basis, of gross domestic product (GDP) or other macroeconomic aggregates. Development, on the other hand, is not intended as a simple quantitative growth, but as an improvement in the quality of life. The development must therefore be seen as the result of various components, not only the quantitative ones related to the composition, production and distribution of resources, but also those related to social and environmental aspects. With this term, we mean the set of pillars on which to construct the entire process necessary to achieve the transition from a linear economy to a circular economy, namely economic, social, environmental and institutional. The collapse of one of them can determine the overall unsustainability of the development process<sup>17</sup>.

The clarification of this fundamental terminological difference refers to the idea that Sustainable Development presupposes the maintenance over time of existing conditions and the ability to guarantee a future without producing degradation. The meaning of Sustainable Development should therefore be to improve the quality of life or well-being in a lasting way over time.

As already known, the definition of Sustainable Development was elaborated by the UN *World Commission on Environment and Development* (WCED) in 1987 according to which:

*“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”<sup>18</sup>.*

According to this definition, Sustainable Development is a particular form of economic growth suitable to meet the needs of our societies in terms of well-being in the short, medium and especially long term. The main emphasis of the idea of development is to highlight the need for a potential change in the vision of the relationship between economic activity and the

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<sup>17</sup> *op.cit.*, GIOVANNINI E., 2018, *L'Utopia Sostenibile*, Laterza, pp.30-31

<sup>18</sup> *op.cit.*, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development A/427427- *Our Common Future*. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/milestones/wced>

natural world, replacing the economic model of quantitative expansion (growth) with that of qualitative improvement (development) as a key to future progress<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> DAILY B.F., HUANG S., (2001) *Achieving sustainability through attention to human resource factors in environmental management*, International Journal of Operations & Production Management, Vol. 21 Issue: 12, pp.1539-1552.



## CHAPTER TWO

### **The fundamental stages at the International level: A Long Road to Sustainable Development**

#### *I. The 1972 Stockholm Conference*

As we have seen, the concept of Sustainable Development began to take hold starting in the 60s, following the realization of the fact that the classic development, linked exclusively to economic growth, would soon cause the collapse of natural systems. The growth purely understood from the economic point of view was no longer enough, we were looking for a philosophy of growth based on sustainability, according to which the development is such if it improves the quality of life in a lasting way.

However, up until the 1960s, the perception of environmental problems caused by human activity of production and consumption was not to most of the population and the political class but was limited almost exclusively to scientists and scholars.

In April 1968, at the *Accademia dei Lincei* in Rome, the Italian manager Aurelio Peccei and the Scottish scientist Alexander King, together with other scientists and intellectuals, founded the Club of Rome<sup>20</sup>. Several factors began to cause concern: the fear of the unstoppable increase of the population that had grown by over one billion in the last fifty years, the evident decrease in grain and oil stocks, and the first signs of suffering from the atmosphere for the increase in the use of fossil fuels. The Club of Rome commissioned a group of researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston (MIT), a study on the medium to long-term effects of exponential demographic growth and industrialization on a system with limited natural resources such as planet Earth. The conclusions of the MIT study in Boston will be published in 1972, in a book entitled *The Limits to Growth*, a report on the limits of classical development, also known as the Meadows Report. The publication of the Meadows Report will constitute a truly revolutionary transition, destined to become a watershed between the era of absolute ignorance and that of a first search for solutions. The study took into account several

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<sup>20</sup> MEADOWS D.H., MEADOWS D.L., RANDERS J., BEHERENS W.W., *The Limits to Growth*, Universe Press, New York, 1972. Retrieved at <http://www.clubofrome.org/report/the-limits-to-growth/>

interacting factors: population growth, industrial capital, food production, pollution and consumption of natural resources. The MIT experts indicated that, given the expected growth rates for population, pollution and resource exploitation, a sudden and uncontrollable decline in population and economic capacity due to the collapse of economic, social and environmental conditions, would have been determined around the middle of the 21st century, which could bring the world's population back from eight to six billion in just a few decades. The relationship marked a turning point in the culture and in the collective awareness, including in the international debate the perception that we must deal with the finite dimension of natural resources. The infinite growth of wealth could prove incompatible with the insufficient amount of natural resources, despite the impressive development of technology<sup>21</sup>.

However, the treaties and international conventions concerning environment that followed one another until the end of the 1960s were mainly directed to regulate certain particular sectors from an economic point of view. With the progressive decolonization, the right of self-determination of peoples was reaffirmed and the states that became independent were granted the right to permanent sovereignty over natural resources to be exercised “*in the interest of their national development and the wellbeing of populations*”<sup>22</sup>.

Since the seventies, the awareness that the natural resources of the Earth must be protected through strategic planning and that nature plays a fundamental role in the economy became more solid. International attention to the environment and global ecological disasters was focused at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm between 5 and 16 June 1972<sup>23</sup>.

It was an exceptional event, as for the first time, 113 representatives of governments met to address the problem of environmental degradation and its consequences for the future of the planet, formulating an Action Plan and a Declaration consisting of a preamble of 7 points and 26 principles on rights and responsibilities of man in relation to the environment concerning freedom, equality and the right to adequate living conditions; the protection and rationalization of natural resources for the benefit of future generations and, finally, the allocation to nature conservation of an important role within the legislative and economic processes of the States. The Environmental Action Program (EAP) called for the achievement of objectives through three different policies such as the assessment of the global environment,

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<sup>21</sup> Worldwatch Institute, *E' ancora possibile la sostenibilità?*, Edition Ambiente, Milano, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> point 1 of Declaration on the permanent sovereignty of States over their natural resources as a constitutive element of the right of self-determination attached to UNGA Resolution 1803 -XVII of 14 December 1962 and Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of State, adopted by UNGA in 1974.

<sup>23</sup> P. BIRNE, A. BOYLE, C. REDGWELL, *International Law & the Environment*, Oxford, 2009.

environmental management and support measures. In the document it was established that the States' economic development plans should have taken particular account of this report and encouraged the adoption of coordinated and integrated measures. These important principles paved the way for a rich debate and growing attention from the scientific community and civil society towards the protection of the environment whose preservation became an integral part of development.

Especially the industrialized countries (Western Europe, Canada, the United States and Japan) took part in the Conference, also due to the excessive industrialization of the previous centuries which had led to an inobservance towards the balance and protection of the environment. The main purpose of the States was to make the care and protection of the environment a priority and a commitment for the whole international community. In fact, in previous years, due to the profound differences and above all the different economic objectives between industrialized countries on the one hand, committed to increase their industrial development, and on the other hand, developing countries, where environmental protection was considered a secondary end to the overcoming of social and economic inequalities, the environmental problem had never been effectively addressed by the international community.

Sustainable Development therefore found its formal statement at the Stockholm Conference during which the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), a subsidiary body of the General Assembly in charge of analyze the interrelations between environment and development, highlighted problems and contradictions and suggested ways to start sustainable economic and environmental policies. The Stockholm Summit was the first step towards creating a global environmental awareness and was considered a milestone in the development of environmental protection policies<sup>24</sup>. In the Declaration of the 26 Principles, particular relevance is observed in Article 2, which established the concept of natural resources for the first time, stating that they include:

*“The natural resources of the earth, including the air, water, land, flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems, must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management, as appropriate”<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> SOHN L.B., *The Stockholm Declaration on Human Environment*, Harvard International Law Journal, Vol. 14 N.3, 1973.

<sup>25</sup> *Declaration of the United Nation Conference on the Human Environment*, Stockholm, June 1972. Retrieved from <http://www.un-documents.net/unchedec.htm>

From this moment the protection and improvement of the environment became, in the intentions of the United Nations, priorities of paramount importance, a presupposition of the well-being of the peoples and of the progress of the whole world. A priority that obliged everyone, from citizens to communities, from companies to institutions, to assume their responsibilities.

In the decade of 1970, international treaties and conventions on the environment proliferated and the initiatives of the specialized UN agencies established commitments and assumptions of regulatory responsibilities by the Contracting States in every area, often on the wave of international emergencies (such as in the case of the 1986 Vienna Conventions on assistance in cases of nuclear accidents or radioactive emergencies, signed exactly five months after the Chernobyl disaster).

Among the most important are the Paris Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 1972, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Montego Bay Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982, which contains specific rules on the protection of the marine environment and defines the marine heritage of humanity in international waters, the Bonn Convention (1979) on the conservation of migratory species belonging to wildlife and finally the Berne Convention (1979) on the conservation of wildlife and the natural environment in Europe.

On 31 October 1972, at the European summit in Paris between the Heads of State and Government, the countries of the European Community, under pressure from the German delegation and with the agreement of the three countries about to enter it (Denmark, Great Britain and Ireland), they decided to start a common environmental policy stating that:

*“economic expansion is not an end in itself: its first aim should be to enable disparities in living conditions to be reduced. It must take place with the participation of all the social partners. It should result in an improvement in the quality of life as well as in standards of living. As befits the genius of Europe, particular attention will be given to intangible values and to protecting the environment so that progress may really be put at the service of mankind<sup>26</sup>”*

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<sup>26</sup> Declaration of The Council of the European Communities and of the Representatives of the governments of the member states meeting in the Council of 22 November 1973, on the Programme of Action of the European Communities on the Environment. Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A41973X1220>

They committed the European Commission to form an *ad hoc* administrative structure to regulate the matter and declared that the economic expansion envisaged by art. 2 of the EEC Treaty should therefore have been implemented with an improvement in the quality of life.

However, already with the Hague summit of December 1969<sup>27</sup>, there was the inauguration of a period of openness to the community reforms aimed at the community enlargement and the institutional reforms that had given attention to the protection of the environment.

Therefore, the Stockholm Conference had the merit of paving the way for the launch of EU environmental policy. In fact, in 1973 the EEC established the Community Action Programs on the environment. The first steps towards a community awareness of the environment will evolve in the direction of Sustainable Development. The urgency of establishing common environmental rules was recognized. Since then, more than 200 community legislative provisions have come into force on the subject within the European Community. These first acts were aimed mainly at the control and labelling of chemical and dangerous substances, the protection of surface water, as well as the monitoring of pollutants. This embryo of environmental policy was carried out by appealing to art. 235 of the Community Treaty, which confers powers of action to the European Community in cases not provided for by the treaty itself. The Community Action Program for the environment was set up within the Directorate General for Industrial Policy (DGIII) of the European Commission, while the Environmental Commission was established within the European Parliament. Since then, seven European Environmental Action Programs have been adopted by resolutions of the Council of Ministers on a proposal from the European Commission, representing general frameworks for member states, but not directly legally binding. These programs contained the principles and aims of the relevant sector policies, on the basis of which environmental policies are implemented through acts with different regulatory power as regulations<sup>28</sup>, directives<sup>29</sup>, legislative decisions<sup>30</sup> and recommendations<sup>31</sup>. The first community Environmental Action

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<sup>27</sup>Conference of Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the European Community. "Comunicato finale del vertice dell'Aja", in *Annuario di politica internazionale*, n.24, 1972, pp.456-458.

<sup>28</sup> acts of general application and with effectiveness *erga omnes*, which are immediately applicable and binding on the member states.

<sup>29</sup> normative acts that are not immediate and have no general scope and which oblige the member state to which they turn to achieve a certain result, leaving it more or less free to choose the means and form most suitable for achieving it, containing measures and standards to be implemented through national laws in the single national laws and main instruments adopted for the development of community environmental policies.

<sup>30</sup> obligatory acts in all its elements but, unlike the regulations, addressed only to the addressees identified in them and endowed with the character of implementing acts of Community law.

<sup>31</sup> non-binding acts

Program (1973-1976), adopted by the Council of the European Communities, aimed primarily at tackling the fight against water and air pollution and eliminating or limiting the negative effects produced, for example, by agricultural and industrial waste, from harmful gas emissions and from noise pollution. It included a reference to the principle of subsidiarity, which later became an essential element for European integration and individual policies, and the urgency of finding common solutions for international environmental problems.

Its main objective was that of preventive action aimed at eliminating possible barriers to the construction of the free market produced by different national environmental laws and to prevent regulatory differences between the various member countries that could give competitive advantages to one state instead of another. In this situation, therefore, the Community environmental policies played an accessory role, without their recognized autonomy, both from a formal and an operational point of view.

The second Environmental Action Program (1977-1981) focused more on prevention, scientific research in the environmental field, international cooperation and between European countries and on the study of an Environmental Impact Assessment system (EIA) that became the object of Directive 337 1985, subsequently amended.

The EIA, became the reference point of Community policy with the third Environmental Action Program (1982-1986), adopted in 1983 and definitively directed to preventive action and to the safeguard of natural resources, to integrate environmental policy into other Community policies, underlining its importance for employment and the economy and identifying priorities and types of interventions adapted to regional specificities.

Nonetheless, up until the 1980s, the approach to the environment had a predominantly sectoral and restorative connotation, in the wake of a non-preventive environmental policy but mainly aimed at remedying the damage produced.

## *II. The establishment of UNEP and the 1987 Brundtland Report*

Starting from the 80s, attention to issues directly related to the protection of the environment has gradually been extended to the social implications of the environmental issue, bringing out ever more clearly the contradictions inherent in a model of development attentive only to the purely economic implications.

The eighties saw the birth of several green parties in Europe that elected their representatives to the European Parliament since 1984, which succeeded in setting up the first Green Group in the European Parliament in 1989, reconstituted since 1999 as a Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance (EFA) following the cooperation established with regionalist political formations. The pressing public demand for national and international environmental policies allowed the political ecology to enter the institutions, while at the same time the number of environmentalist and ecological associations and movements (in particular the WWF, the Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace) experienced an unprecedented and impetuous growth.

In 1980, in Nairobi, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), together with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), published a document called *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*<sup>32</sup>. It is the first official international document that bears the concept of Sustainable Development in its title. The document explains how the saving of natural resources is the basis of a model of sustainable human development, which must represent an absolute priority for all countries in the world and gives concrete solutions to implement this model. Development was defined, for the first time, as an improvement in human life within the limits of the ecosystem load capacity.

Moreover, in 1980 the Court of Justice of the European Communities definitively sanctioned the need to standardize national laws on environmental protection to defend competition, with the provision of charges for polluting companies. In 1981 the European Commission set up, in order to manage the initiatives for environmental protection, the General Directorate XI (DGXI), which established itself as the main actor of the community environmental policy making. If the first environmental directives were more reflective of the need to guarantee common standards with regard to the principles of the EEC Treaty and above all to guarantee the free movement of goods and services, since the 80s, directives and regulations became important instruments of impetus to stimulate significant and specific actions of environmental policy in the individual countries, essentially endeavouring to invest a wide range of sectors of intervention.

The Court of Justice greatly contributed to clarifying and legitimizing national and EU environmental policies as imperative requirements capable of imposing restrictions on the

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<sup>32</sup> *World conservation strategy: living resource conservation for sustainable development*, 1980. Retrieved at <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/6424>

freedom of trade, considering for example legitimate tax charges applicable to non-biodegradable products or recognizing waste as goods.

Over the years, the interdependence of phenomena having environmental impact and not limited to the competence of individual member states became increasingly evident in European legislation. In the '80s a close confrontation between Northern European countries (the Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands) also began, with more stringent environmental regulations and more influenced by the emergence of environmentalism and green movements<sup>33</sup>, and those of Southern Europe (France, Italy and the countries that joined the European Community between 1981 and 1986, i.e. Greece, Spain and Portugal) which, together with Great Britain, were opposed to greater constraints and commitments. A major obstacle to the effective implementation of Community rules was due to the unanimity principle required for Council votes in this matter, used by countries opposed to greater environmental protection<sup>34</sup>.

The European Community began to acquire an important role as a subject called upon to activate international environmental cooperation by joining on behalf of the member states to various conventions and treaties for environmental protection. With the third Environmental Action Program (1982-1986) an effective preventive policy towards the environment began, no longer subordinated solely to the creation of the common market but introduced into other policies, in particular the agricultural, industrial, energy policies and transport to promote environmental policy as the foundation of economic and social development.

Important control instruments were introduced, such as the first of the directives on the risks of major accidents associated with certain industrial activities, the Council Directive 501 and the already mentioned EIA Directive which, subsequently amended, established rigorous controls and procedures to assess the environmental compatibility of initiatives aimed at transforming the territory (building works, infrastructures, etc.).

Starting from a sentence of February 1985 of the Court of Justice of the European Communities, which had affirmed the priority nature of environmental protection, the next steps led to an acceleration towards an ever greater integration: with the Single European Act (1987) enters into the European Community Treaties, Title XX, dedicated to the environment, thus conferring this policy a formal legal basis and at the same time setting three main

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<sup>33</sup> in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1983 the Greens - *Die Grünen* - were the first new party since the end of the Second World War to enter the national parliament, the Bundestag, overcoming the barrier of 5% of votes on a federal basis and to consolidate as a political actor in subsequent years.

<sup>34</sup> SCOTT J., *Environmental Protection. European Law and Governance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.



objectives on the subject: environmental protection, protection of human health, wise and rational use of natural resources.

Furthermore, in Title VII, environmental policy was recognized as a legitimate aim and the decision-making process had to be taken by the Council of Ministers in accordance with the cooperation procedure in which the European Parliament was supported by qualified majority voting when these were linked to the functioning of the single market. It was also recognized the possibility for Member States to introduce more environmentally friendly limits and standards than those adopted at Community level and the assessment of environmental protection as a fundamental element in other sector policies<sup>35</sup>.

Likewise, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of April 1986 was followed by the serious pollution caused to the waters of the Rhine in November of the same year. Following the spill of over 30 tonnes of chemicals by the Basel Sandoz industry, the river flora and fauna were wiped out by these substances, which also reached Germany, France and the Netherlands, creating major problems for the human water supply. The common perception of the international dimension of environmental problems became even clearer and could only be dealt with through constant transnational and international cooperation.

The fourth Environmental Action Program (1987-1992) attempted to outline a global approach to environmental policies, expanding the areas of intervention to the management of natural areas and inserting economic and fiscal instruments to discourage pollution. The period between March 1987 and 1988 was proclaimed 'European Year for the Environment' and in the following years there was a marked accentuation of the community commitment to the environment, offset however by a growing non-compliance of the application in the member states and the difficulty of monitoring the results achieved<sup>36</sup>.

Two European summits in the early 1990s emphasized the community commitment in international environmental negotiations and support for the improvement of environmental conditions in Eastern European countries that had just regained their independence: the European Environment Council meeting in Dublin in June 1990<sup>37</sup> highlighted in particular the role that the European Community had to play in the negotiations for the resolution of international environmental problems such as greenhouses effect and ozone depletion, climate

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<sup>35</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Axy0027>

<sup>36</sup> ENV-ENVAP 4C - Resolution (ECSC, EEC, Euratom) on the continuation and implementation of a European Community policy and action programme on the environment, 1987-1992. Retrieved at [https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/rcn/219\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/rcn/219_en.html)

<sup>37</sup> PALLEMAERTS M., AZMANOVA A., *The European Union and Sustainable Development: Internal and External Dimensions*, Asp / Vubpress / Upa, 2006, pag.21.

change, safeguarding of biodiversity, in view of its position as a moral, economic and political authority; and in June 1991, in the castle of Dobris near Prague, the first meeting of all the Ministers of the Environment of Europe took place, which decided to draw up a complete and pan-European inventory of environmental problems<sup>38</sup>.

Moreover, fundamental was the publication, in 1987, of the document *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*<sup>39</sup> developed by the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) and presented at the UN on the occasion of the homonymous Tokyo Conference, better known as the Brundtland Report, from the name of former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, who at that time presided over the WCED. In this document, which then became a milestone in the progress of the culture of sustainability, appears the most accredited definition of Sustainable Development mentioned above. It was a revolutionary document that left a deep trace in the debate on the Sustainable Development of the following years, enunciating some fundamental assumptions that underlie it; the link between environment and development, the interdependence between nations in the management of environment, the extension of the concept of development to that of social equity. The concept of Sustainable Development is accompanied by the intention to consider the environment in a holistic way, based on the well-established awareness that the environment knows no borders and its protection requires the coordinated and conscious action of all the countries of the world. The Brundtland Commission statement did not impose absolute limits on economic development, but those imposed by the present state of technological and social organization in the use of environmental resources and the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. This Report identified with great clarity three main obstacles on the road to achieving a development compatible with the defense of the environment. The first was represented by the almost absolute dependence on fossil fuels as an energy source for human activities<sup>40</sup>. This exploitation, besides aggravating the geopolitical imbalances between the North and the South of the planet, was also responsible for phenomena of transnational pollution such as acid rain, the greenhouse effect, the hole in the ozone, etc. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), the alternatives able to lead to sustainability, that is the use of renewable energy sources, had not been pursued with due diligence because of the strong economic interests of

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<sup>38</sup> HENDERSON K., *Back To Europe: Central And Eastern Europe And The European Union*, Routledge, 2005, pag.148.

<sup>39</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>

<sup>40</sup> KNOX P., AGNEW J., *The Geography of the World Economy*, London, E. Arnold, 1994 (trad. it. Geografia economica, Vol.2., Milano, Angeli, 1996).

large multinational companies and governments that control the supply of fossil fuels. A second threat to Sustainable Development had been identified in the irrepressible demographic explosion of the countries of the South of the world, which risked making the size and growth of the population incompatible with the productive capacities of the ecosystem. Therefore, one of the salient aspects of the Brundtland Report was given by the fact that it linked explicitly the ecological and social problems, stating that underdevelopment is one of the main causes of environmental damage. Thus, it was absolutely necessary to help developing countries to implement non-aggressive growth models towards ecosystems, by making transfers of financial resources and technologies from the most advanced countries. The third obstacle identified by the Report was the inadequacy of the institutional framework, as there were no supranational institutions or institutions with the necessary power to coordinate and impose global economic, technological and ecological choices essential for the pursuit of effective Sustainable Development.

However, in addition to identifying the main obstacles to achieving a development compatible with environmental protection, the Report aimed to define the terms on which to rethink Sustainable Development. In fact, in order to ensure the satisfaction of the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs, the pillars on which this process should have been built were economic, social, environmental and institutional and the collapse of one of them would have determined the overall unsustainability of the whole development process. In particular, it should be emphasized that, from an institutional point of view, the aspect of the centrality of 'participation of all', was a condition that should have been supported by the political systems in the decision process, in order to ensure a greater level of democracy in international choices.

The main merit of the Report is to have set in motion a process that created the context for most of the sustainability policies and legislative activities on the matter that will proliferate in the following decade, although the definition of Sustainable Development proposed by the Brundtland Commission appeared:

*“Not immediately usable to measure the sustainability of a development process through statistical indicators. It is a definition that puts on the same level the 'intragenerational' justice, that is the one concerning the relationships between people and peoples belonging to the same generation, and the 'intergenerational' one, which links the different generations among them. It is a definition that goes beyond the simple relationship between economic growth and environmental limits, indicating that there is no more important pillar than the others and that*

*without a balance between the different dimensions the development process tends to surrender, just like the Report to the Club of Rome had demonstrated<sup>41</sup>”.*

For this reason, despite the Stockholm Conference represented the adoption of some principles that are the basis of the concept of Sustainable Development and the Brundtland Report defined for the first time this concept, until the beginning of the 90s, the approach to environmental protection was carried out above all through conventions and mainly sectorial treaties that led to poor results. The same policies adopted under UNEP had not produced the desired outcome, as this institution had not received any kind of support from the States.

In this sense, the nineties represented the years of becoming aware that a real path towards Sustainable Development and effective protection of the environment could have given positive results only if they had concretely contemplated the economic, environmental, social and institutional aspects of this idea by adopting it internationally, especially in light of the numerous environmental disasters that were taking place in different parts of the world. From this moment on, numerous UN conferences will help develop the notion of sustainability in its various dimensions, from human rights to the status of women, from desertification to social development. Sustainability constituted the key concept of this decade and was expressed in different ways and at various levels, it became increasingly evident that the culture of responsibility should concern everyone.

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<sup>41</sup> *op.cit.*, GIOVANNINI E., 2018, *L'Utopia Sostenibile*, Laterza, pag. 30

## CHAPTER THREE

### From Rio'92 to Johannesburg Conference

#### *I. The Rio Earth Summit 1992*

Driven by these motivations, the UN General Assembly called in 1992 the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which took place in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil from 3 to 14 June<sup>42</sup>. The event, also known as the Earth Summit, included 172 governments, represented by 108 heads of state and government, as well as 2400 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the 'Global Forum'. Within the Conference, the most relevant achievements were The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Forest Principles.

The main message that echoed at the Rio meeting was the close connection between global and local aspects in order to bring out the need to integrate the different dimensions of development. The urgent need to identify a universal path for building Sustainable Development led the member countries to recognize that solutions to environmental problems must involve all<sup>43</sup>. The solutions to be adopted should have met the need for a new approach more sensitive to the social dimension and the need to create new instruments based on prevention, through which a Sustainable Development process can be initiated, in the awareness of the close interconnection between environment and development. The Rio summit represented a turning point for resolving development-environment duality.

It became clear that, since the environment was a global problem, its protection could no longer be pursued at national level and that it should have been looked upon as an indispensable prerequisite for planning future economic and social development<sup>44</sup>. The world's great powers recognized their responsibility for the production of pollution and convinced themselves that they had to collaborate in environmental matters, to support developing

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<sup>42</sup> UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992.

Retrieved at <http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/enviro.html>

<sup>43</sup> VALLEGA A., *Geopolitica e sviluppo sostenibile. Il sistema mondo nel secolo XXI*, Milano, Mursia, 1994.

<sup>44</sup> BROWN L.R., FLAVIN C., POSTEL S., *Un pianeta da salvare. Per un'economia globale compatibile con l'ambiente*, F. Angeli, Milano, 1992.

countries and to achieve a greater balance between the exploitation of natural resources and their protection.

This was probably the great novelty of the Rio Conference that, unlike that of Stockholm, represented an epochal turning point in the awareness of the need to manage environmental issues on a global scale and to make States aware of the serious environmental damage that their behavior was producing. Furthermore, in order to reduce the disparities in living standards and better meet the needs of the world population, the commitment to eliminate poverty was identified as a prerequisite for Sustainable Development.

However, the greatest difficulty in implementing the objectives identified in the Rio Conference was the divergence, which has always existed, between the concept of the environment and the concept of development, which was revived in the dialogue between the North and the South of the world and it took shape in the claims of developing countries towards the Western world, with regard to the future of the economy and the environment. In fact, on the one hand the developing countries gave priority to development and did not intend to pay for the mistakes made by the rich countries regarding the level of environmental pollution produced by the industrial development process, on the other hand, the rich countries asked the developing countries to commit for safeguarding the environment. The conviction of developing countries was such new idea of development, although sustainable, would still have favoured the rich countries to a greater extent. The eternal gap between North and South, therefore, has meant that the largest conference in history, by number and level of participation, produced only partial results in order to reach an agreement.

Despite this, the Rio Conference was a milestone in the path towards the promotion of the model of Sustainable Development worldwide<sup>45</sup>. After two years of intense preparatory work, the primary objective of the 183 countries was to establish “*a new and equitable global partnership*<sup>46</sup>” e “*create new levels of cooperation among States, key sectors of societies and people*<sup>47</sup>”, proceeding through the conclusion of international agreements aimed at protecting the integrity of the global environment and development system. With this in mind, a new international intervention strategy was proposed that affirmed a global and interrelated vision

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<sup>45</sup> PINESCHI L., *La Conferenza di Rio de Janeiro su ambiente e sviluppo* in Rivista Giuridica Ambientale, 1992, p.706.

<sup>46</sup> THORP T., *Climate Justice: A voice for the future*, Springer, 2014, pag.172.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*

of environmental issues called 'environmental globalism'<sup>48</sup>, which expressed itself in the achievement of important documents and agreements on the future of the planet.

The first document is certainly the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development<sup>49</sup>, which emphasized the link between environmental protection and development, the need to eradicate poverty and take into account the needs of developing countries; on the urgency of finding alternatives to unsustainable production and consumption models, of increasing local capacities to tackle environmental issues and promoting an open international economic framework that supports Sustainable Development.

The Declaration stated 27 universally applicable principles of political nature, intended to guide international action in accordance with environmental and economic responsibilities. Among these, the most important were the Precautionary Principle, the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and the Polluter Pays Principle.

*The Precautionary Principle*<sup>50</sup> had, as a distinctive element, that of attributing legal importance to situations marked by scientific uncertainty. This principle concerns to anticipate the adoption of measures to protect the environment before the severity of the risks was fully demonstrated<sup>51</sup>. The main purpose of this formula is to underline how the scientific uncertainty regarding possible negative consequences of certain human activities or behaviours cannot be used as an exemption for not having taken preventive measures to protect the environment.

*The Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities*<sup>52</sup> instead, referred to the debate on the disparities between industrialized and developing countries as it concerned the common responsibility of States to protect the global environment and the different contribution that States made to climate change in relation to their ability to cope with environmental crises, in particular for industrialized countries. Therefore, this principle imposed on States to collaborate for the approval of measures useful for the resolution of environmental problems and involves obligations that vary in a different way on the States. Obviously, industrialized states were burdened by greater obligation as they were primarily responsible for the environmental degradation of the planet, nevertheless, they had better means to tackle the solution of the problem more effectively. Although this principle did not

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<sup>48</sup> KEOHANE, ROBERT O., AND JOSEPH S. NYE. "Globalization: What's New? What's Not? (And So What?)." in *Foreign Policy*, no. 118, 2000, pp. 104–119.

<sup>49</sup> Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda, vol. I: Resolutions adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex I. Retrieved at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm/>

<sup>50</sup> Principle number 15 in The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 13 Giugno 1992

<sup>51</sup> FODELLA A., PINESCHI L., *La protezione dell'ambiente nel diritto internazionale*, Giappichelli Editore, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Principle no. 7 of The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992.

completely exempt developing countries from compliance with environmental obligations, it allowed them, in some cases, to receive favourable treatment. In particular, this can be seen in the flexibility of the obligations contained in various environmental agreements that take into account the technical, scientific and economic capabilities of the Parties. In extreme cases, developing countries are exempted from compliance with certain obligations: a striking example is the case of climate change involving an obligation to reduce greenhouse gases only by industrialized countries, leaving developing countries free from any obligation.

Similarly, the *Polluter Pays Principle*<sup>53</sup>, established that the compensation for the damage produced must be borne by the person responsible for the activity that caused the pollution. In this way, the States should have committed themselves to adopt measures for the prevention and repair of damage, which would only have a bearing on the potential polluter and not on the whole community.

Overall, the 27 principles articulated the awareness that it was necessary to combine efforts for the achievement of some priority objectives such as the guarantee of intergenerational fairness, the satisfaction of the needs of the poorest countries, cooperation between States, the obligation to compensate the environmental damage, access to environmental information and environmental impact assessment<sup>54</sup>.

The second policy document for programming purposes, produced in the context of the Rio Conference, was Agenda 21<sup>55</sup>, consisting of an action plan for specific economic, social and environmental initiatives aimed at defining a true strategy of integration between environment and development, to be implemented with a coordinated effort of the entire international community. The Agenda was a comprehensive document comprising 40 chapters, over 100 program areas and 3,000 recommendations. It encompassed key sectors such as agriculture, industry and urban management, a range of environmental priorities such as biodiversity conservation, the protection of seas and oceans, climate change, hazardous waste, toxic chemicals and water, as well as a number of intersectoral aspects such as technological exchange, poverty, population and trade. Agenda 21 reflected the need to define strategies and measures to reduce the environmental impact of human activities and to stop the ongoing degradation, in order to create a model of Sustainable Development. Although it does not

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<sup>53</sup> Principle no. 16 of The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992.

<sup>54</sup> ANTICH F., *Origine ed evoluzione del diritto internazionale ambientale. Verso una governance globale dell'ambiente: Agenda 21*. Retrieved at: [https://www.ambientediritto.it/dottrina/Diritto%20internazionale%20ambiente/Origine\\_evoluzione\\_diritto\\_internazionale\\_ambientale.htm](https://www.ambientediritto.it/dottrina/Diritto%20internazionale%20ambiente/Origine_evoluzione_diritto_internazionale_ambientale.htm)

<sup>55</sup> Agenda 21, UNCED, 1992. Retrieved from: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=23&menu=35>



contain any legal constraints, it will constitute a long-term general program to be followed as guidelines for Sustainable Development in the 21st century. The core of the Agenda reiterated that the most urgent need was the integration of environmental issues at every institutional and government level, to ensure greater transversality between sectoral policies; the provision of a planning, control and management system to support this integration; and above all, the encouragement of public participation and the subjects involved with full access to information. Furthermore, sustainability actions did not start with the assumption of responsibility with respect to environmental degradation, as was the case within the Brundtland Report, but with the assumption of responsibility towards development models. Citizens, administrations and the various social components should have sensitized and understood their strategic role in order to create a synergistic action between politics, the productive world and the behavior of individuals to achieve the realization of Sustainable Development. This shift from an imposing perspective to a participatory, open and flexible, would have been the prerequisite for a new global governance.

In this regard, the so-called Local Agenda 21<sup>56</sup>, present in chapter 28 of the same, represented precisely the shared will to build a common scenario of Sustainable Development. Under the slogan "Think global, act local", the Local Agenda 21, promoted a participatory and democratic process that involved all sectors; it is also a process of defining the environmental objectives and building the conditions, such as consensus, interest, synergies, human and financial resources and to put them into practice. The local authorities were then called into question for the implementation of the program plan through the local partnership. An instrument that took into consideration the different nature of the problems faced and the different priorities that distinguish the local authorities in their territorial distribution, to launch strategies for Sustainable Development responding to local characteristics, able to look at the medium-long term and structured in an integrated way. The desired result was the start of a conscious path to improve the quality of the environment and development on a local basis according to principles of cooperation and integration. The implementation of Agenda 21 has therefore been planned to include interventions at international, national, regional and local levels and will represent the transition from the scientific and cultural deepening of the Sustainable Development's concept to the assumption of world political commitments.

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<sup>56</sup> *op.cit.*, ANTICH F., Origine ed evoluzione del diritto internazionale ambientale. Verso una governance globale dell'ambiente: Agenda 21. Retrieved at: [https://www.ambientediritto.it/dottrina/Diritto%20internazionale%20ambiente/Origine\\_evoluzione\\_diritto\\_internazionale\\_ambientale.htm](https://www.ambientediritto.it/dottrina/Diritto%20internazionale%20ambiente/Origine_evoluzione_diritto_internazionale_ambientale.htm)

In Italy, for example, in order to implement Agenda 21, the Ministry of the Environment defined the “National Plan for Sustainable Development”, which was approved by the CIPE on December 23, 1993. The Plan includes actions in the productive sectors such as industry, agriculture, tourism, energy, transport and waste, a terminal problem in production and consumption processes. This is the first Italian document on the environment that has an inter-ministerial character. Agenda 21 was a starting point for Italy to reach the Rio objectives<sup>57</sup>.

At the Rio summit, three other major Conventions were also adopted, The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the so-called ‘Forest Principles’<sup>58</sup> and it was decided to start negotiations to reach the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)<sup>59</sup> that was approved in 1994.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)<sup>60</sup> in addition to represent the starting point for reaching the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, it contained the guidelines and actions to be taken not to further compromise the atmosphere; with this convention the objective was set to stabilize the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to the use of fossil fuels, to such a level as to prevent dangerous consequences for the climatic balance. It is no surprise, the greatest responsibility for the growth of climate-changing emissions was caused by the industrialized countries, which not only required greater economic efforts to reduce air pollution, but paradoxically, they were also given the task of launching measures that would have led to the reduction of climate-changing emissions.

The Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>61</sup> (CBD) aimed at promoting a balanced access to the biological resources of the ecosystems and invited international states, intergovernmental organizations and the non-governmental sector for the development of plans and programs aimed at the conservation of biodiversity and the lasting use of its components. It indicated a series of objectives on the basis of which elaborating appropriate strategies for the effective conservation of biodiversity, for the evaluation of the environmental effects of national development policies and for the development of scientific, technical and institutional means to provide the basic knowledge necessary for the elaboration of appropriate measures and their implementation. Last but not least, the Forest Declaration, informally defined as ‘Forest

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<sup>57</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.minambiente.it/pagina/il-percorso-dello-sviluppo-sostenibile-1993>

<sup>58</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-3annex3.htm>

<sup>59</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.unccd.int/convention/about-convention>

<sup>60</sup> Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/>

<sup>61</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.cbd.int/convention/default.shtml>

Principles', established a set of non-binding principles for the management, conservation and sustainable use of forests, aimed at regulating national and international policies.

Furthermore, the 1992 Rio Conference led to the establishment of a Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), dependent on the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)<sup>62</sup>. Its aim of ensuring effective implementation, monitoring and promotion at local, national, regional and international level of the decisions resulting from the Rio Conference and subsequent work of the global Conventions. However, CSD decisions do not seem to have had the desired effect in terms of achieving Sustainable Development.

This remark must be seen within the objective observation of the Earth Summit, which left ample room for perplexities due to the poor practical application of its contents. Although the 1992 conference led to the elaboration of still important principles succeeding - on the one hand, to develop in industrialized countries the awareness of having to prevent pollution phenomena with greater determination and, on the other hand, to outline the essential guidelines of an environmental policy for developing countries still lacking sector legislation - unfortunately, the results it has led to, have not been completely satisfactory.

In fact, from a practical point of view, the blueprint of Agenda 21, which formalized some Sustainable Development projects with the aim of creating the basis for the subsequent development plans, will not have the desired result. One of the causes could be that the relationship between Agenda 21 appeared complete but lacking in priority, and while on the one hand there were numerous objectives, deadlines and actions, on the other, it did not include any general objective representing a political synthesis, lacking guidelines on how the objectives should have been translated into operational terms.

Certainly, it can be assumed that the Rio Earth Summit, twenty years after the Stockholm Declaration, has awakened the international community from the scarcity so far demonstrated in terms of concrete planning of measures for Sustainable Development and has triggered a more proactive attitude in dealing with problems connected with the environment. Environmental protection, at least in intent, had become an integrated element of other policies, in full respect of the concept of Sustainable Development.

However, despite the importance of some of the actions undertaken in the awareness of the need to promote Sustainable Development, the approach of the Rio Conference turned out to be unsuccessful in many ways. Contrary to the initial intent of the Earth summit, the Earth

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<sup>62</sup> Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/intergovernmental/csd>

Charter<sup>63</sup> was not adopted. It would mean a universal declaration on the protection of the environment and Sustainable Development which clearly exposes the rights and duties of human beings towards natural environment with the aim of laying the foundations for an international environmental law.

Moreover, the Rio summit proved unsuccessful in relation to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which was invalidated in the bud because of the lack of adhesion of the USA, which probably preserved the interests of its industrial sector choosing not to sign it. Likewise, the Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC), whose adoption was hampered by the US opposition to establish a precise timetable for emission reductions and a precise extent of this reduction. In addition to this, the Forests Convention has not started, due to the enormous fractures that have emerged between the countries of the South and those of the North, and it was not until 1994 that the United Nations Convention to combat desertification came about. Above all, it is from the point of view of the granted results on the health of the planet that the Rio summit remained an unanticipated premise because in the following years, the situation of the environment has definitely worsened, especially in terms of intragenerational and intergenerational equity.

The major limitation of the Rio Declaration was represented by the fact that it, like that of Stockholm, was composed of the mere enunciation of principles, which did not result in a binding instrument for states that agreed to adhere to it and which did not imply rights or duties: if on the one hand the non-binding instrument encouraged the participation of several states that recognized the existence of a shared problem, on the other, it induced the participants not to comply with specific standards and obligations, as confirmed by the state of health of the environment<sup>64</sup>.

The EU took part both in the preparation process of UNCED and in the participatory process and the implementation of the Conventions and Protocols that have emerged from Rio, with an active action to coordinate common positions among the member states. The European path on the road to sustainability began with the fifth Environmental Action Program for a Sustainable Development<sup>65</sup>, then continued with the Amsterdam Treaty and the European Councils in Cardiff, Helsinki and Göteborg. These were joined by the participations of the CSD and the various technical working groups on the different issues addressed. The work carried out until then was very important from the point of view of the formation of public opinion and

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<sup>63</sup> Retrieved at <http://earthcharter.org/discover/history-of-the-earth-charter/>

<sup>64</sup> VIÑUALES J.E., *The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: A Commentary*, OUP Oxford, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.eea.europa.eu/help/glossary/eea-glossary/fifth-environment-action-programme>

the increase of awareness on issues related to environmentally friendly development. In fact, in order to make the Rio agreements operational, in 1993 the fifth Environmental Action Program for a Sustainable Development was approved for the period 1993-2000. The EU decided to follow a path that was consistent with the commitments undertaken at international level, working to integrate the principles of Sustainable Development into the various Community sectoral policies.

The necessity of the fifth Environmental Action Program was born from the observation of the state of the environment for which, despite twenty years of environmental policy, the phenomenon of deterioration of natural resources continued to occur. In particular, there were worsening in terms of atmospheric pollution, water, soil, degradation of urban landscapes, poor waste management. This Action Program called for a change in the behavioural patterns of society by promoting the participation of all sectors, strengthening the spirit of co-responsibility that extends to public administration, businesses and the community. It marked a very significant evolutionary phase of environmental policy, in particular because the legislative, economic and financial instruments for the implementation of the program are extended. In fact, numerous member states introduced measures for taxation and sanctions for polluting activities. The Program therefore had the ambition to act by modifying the relationships between actors and the environment, to intervene in a profound way on the engines of development, directing them towards a path of Sustainable Development, promoting the change in consumption and production patterns and international cooperation within Agenda 21 framework. The important novelty of the fifth Environmental Action Program will be the expansion of the intervention tools for the implementation of environmental policy, the improvement of information and environmental statistics, support for scientific research and technological development, improvement of sector planning, public information and vocational training and financial support mechanisms such as LIFE programs, Structural Funds, loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Cohesion Fund<sup>66</sup>. In particular, the EIB contributed to the financing of investments to protect the environment in terms of water treatment and collection, waste treatment and the reduction of polluting emissions. The fifth Action Program aimed to tackle complex and partly new environmental issues<sup>67</sup>, such as climate change and the protection of biodiversity, and at the same time proceed towards the

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<sup>66</sup> introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in order to help the four countries with the lowest GDP: Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Spain.

<sup>67</sup> Among the inspiring criteria of the European environmental policy was the precautionary principle, enunciated by the art. 15 of the Rio de Janeiro Declaration in 1992.

achievement of new goals to guarantee air quality, proper water management, the liveability of urban environments, the preservation of coastal areas and the recovery and disposal of waste. It established the need to apply a new integrated intervention strategy, based on the adoption of transversal measures on five areas of primary interest such as industry, the energy sector, agriculture, transport and tourism, surpassing the previous intervention approach for pollution categories. For example, the manufacturing industry was urged to a more careful management of resources, to the improvement of information available to the citizen, the adoption of European standards, to preserve the integrity of the internal market and the competitiveness of European companies. The energy sector should have improved efficiency in the use of energy, reduction of fossil fuel consumption and promotion of renewable sources<sup>68</sup>.

Over the years following the Rio conference, several global and multilateral agreements have been adopted, on issues concerning Sustainable Development. Important progress was made in adopting environmental instruments and policies.

Subsequently, the Treaty on European Union (TEU), known as the Maastricht Treaty, entered into force in 1993, sanctioned the passage of the European Community to the European Union. Within the Treaty, the reference to the concept of sustainability, understood as a form of economic development to be pursued, is repeatedly and constantly present:

*“The Community shall have as its task, by establishing a common market and an economic and monetary union and by implementing the common policies or activities referred to in Articles 3 and 3a, to promote throughout the Community a harmonious and balanced development of economic activities, sustainable and non-inflationary growth respecting the environment, a high degree of convergence of economic performance, a high level of employment and of social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States<sup>69</sup>”*

and as a guiding principle for the achievement of the objectives shared by the member states of the newly formed Union, marking an explicit reference to the environmental impact:

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<sup>68</sup> SEGRE A., DANSERO E., *Politiche per l'ambiente. Dalla natura al territorio*, Torino, UTET, 1996.

<sup>69</sup> Treaty on European Union, (92/C 191/01), TITLE II, PROVISIONS AMENDING THE TREATY ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY WITH A VIEW TO ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, Article G, Article 2, Official Journal of the European Communities. Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A11992M%2FTXT>

*“Community policy in the sphere of development cooperation, which shall be complementary to the policies pursued by the Member States, shall foster: the sustainable economic and social development of the developing countries, and more particularly the most disadvantaged among them”<sup>70</sup>*

As we can see, the Treaty inserted, even more firmly, the theme of the environment in the Community policies, underlining how the environmental protection needs must be included in the implementation of all Community policies. In other words, environmental problems should not be treated separately, but require integration with sectoral policies. Thus, the Treaty of Maastricht added a fourth objective to the three historical objectives of the Community action in the environmental field already outlined by the Single European Act, recognizing the international relevance of the Community action in the environmental field. In fact, the Treaty of Maastricht devoted the entire Title XVI to the environment and fully consecrated the passage of environmental policy from community action to community policy. Environmental policy therefore became a recognized structural policy of the EU. The Maastricht Treaty explicitly provided for the precautionary principle and the need to promote international and regional environmental cooperation<sup>71</sup>.

This political change in the EU was also due to the establishment in 1994 of the European Environment Agency (EEA), based in Copenhagen. The main task of the EEA was to collect, analyse and disseminate data on the state of the environment in the various regions of the European Union, providing widespread and detailed documentation to environmental policy makers. The Agency also plays an important role in harmonizing the environmental accounting data of European Union countries, thus allowing the member states to have comparable information on the environment, and to create a European network of information and observation on the subject.

After Rio, in order for Europe to respond positively to the challenge of Sustainable Development, the first European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns was held in May 1994 in Aalborg, Denmark. The Conference was organized by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)<sup>72</sup> under the joint patronage of the European Commission, and its objective was to promote a strong adhesion by member states to the new

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<sup>70</sup> TITLE XVII, DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION, Article 130u, Official Journal of the European Communities. Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A11992M%2FTXT>

<sup>71</sup> WILKINSON D., *Maastricht and the environment: The implications for the EC's environment policy of the treaty on European union*, Journal of Environmental Law 4(2) January 2002, pp.35-45.

<sup>72</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.iclei-europe.org/>

socio-economic model of Sustainable Development at European level. In this scenario, a priority role was recognized for the implementation of environmental sustainability policies for cities and local authorities, in particular in implementation of Agenda 21 programs. It is at the local level that the process of changing models of production, consumption and use of space was triggered. In fact, the result of the Conference was the elaboration of the Aalborg Charter, initially signed by 80 European local administrations and by 253 representatives of international organizations, national governments, scientific institutes, consultants and individual citizens. With the signing of this Charter, European cities and regions committed themselves to implementing Agenda 21 at the local level, advancing long-term plans for Sustainable Development and launching a campaign to raise awareness. The Aalborg Charter gave rise to the "European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign", in which the citizen's participation and the good governance of the territory will be enhanced<sup>73</sup>.

Two years later, as a continuation of this European campaign that saw the cities at the center of the new governance project for a model of Sustainable Development, a thousand representatives of local and regional organizations from all over Europe met in Lisbon, from 6 to 8 October 1996, giving life to the second European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns. The Lisbon meeting was made to evaluate the progress made by the Aalborg Conference. The document produced by the Conference was the approval of the "Lisbon Action Plan: from Charter to Action" which sanctioned the translation into concrete actions of the principles on sustainability.

The road to a global commitment to Sustainable Development passed through a long series of international conferences, which proliferated during the 1990/2000 decade, such as that of Vienna (1993) concerning human rights, Cairo (1994) on population and development, that of Beijing (1995) on the status of women, as well as the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen (1995), the UN Convention on Desertification (1994) in Paris and the United Nations Conference Habitat II (1996) on human settlements. In particular, the latter relaunched Agenda 21, the cornerstone of the outcome of the Earth Summit of Rio '92, as this program dictated the guidelines to follow for Sustainable Development in the 21st century.

Simultaneously, The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification Particularly in

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<sup>73</sup> HRISTOVA S., DRAGIĆEVIĆ ŠEŠIĆ M., DUXBURY N., *Culture and Sustainability in European Cities: Imagining Europolis*, Routledge, April 2015.



Africa (UNCCD)<sup>74</sup>, had as its declared objective the maximum international cooperation aimed at improving the productivity and recovery of cultivated lands, their conservation, and their sustainable management, also with a view to preventing the long-term consequences of desertification, including mass migrations, extinction of animal species, climate change, but above all it represented a new joint commitment of the industrialized countries towards the poorest countries to receive concrete financial resources from all institutional and private sources, facilitating access to technology and knowledge. As can be seen, the Convention to combat desertification envisaged a truly participatory approach by the acceding States. However, the resources available for its implementation were limited<sup>75</sup>.

The European competences aimed at achieving Sustainable Development were then further expanded, with the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam which entered into force in 1999. With this treaty, Sustainable Development became one of the priority objectives of the European Union, establishing the obligation to integrate environmental protection into all Union sectoral policies.

Environmental protection, with the changes made over the years to the European Treaties, had become a constitutional principle of the European Union and an EU policy that was not subordinated to the other fundamental aims of the EU.

The Treaty of Amsterdam sanctioned the transversal integration of environmental protection objectives into all EU policies with the ultimate goal of achieving Sustainable Development. Article 2 of the Treaty stated that:

*“The Community shall have as its task, by establishing a common market and an economic and monetary union and by implementing common policies or activities referred to in Articles 3 and 3a, to promote throughout the Community a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities, a high level of employment and of social protection, equality between men and women, sustainable and non-inflationary growth, a high degree of competitiveness and convergence of economic performance, a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, the raising*

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<sup>74</sup> The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (UNCCD), 1994, Paris.

Retrieved at <https://www.unccd.int/convention/about-convention>

<sup>75</sup> JOHNSON P.M., MAYRAND K., PAQUIN M., *Governing Global Desertification: Linking Environmental Degradation, Poverty and Participation*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006.

*of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States*<sup>76</sup>”

The Treaty foresaw that EU policy should aim to increase the level of protection and at the same time correct at the source the damage caused to the environment, insisting on the importance of preventive action and based on the "polluter pays principle"<sup>77</sup>.

1997 also saw the birth of the Kyoto Protocol, an international environmental treaty concerning global warming that was drawn up on December 11, 1997 in the Japanese city of Kyoto by more than 180 countries on the occasion of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which entered into force in 1994 and which will be followed by the annual Conferences of the Parties (COP), the body set up to implement the principles and commitments of the UN conventions. The Protocol, approved by the Conference of the Parties (COP3) and opened for signature on March 16, 1998, contains the first decisions on the operational implementation of the commitments established during the Rio de Janeiro summit and formalized in the UNFCCC of 1992. The treaty included the obligation to reduce emissions of pollution elements, the so-called greenhouse gases<sup>78</sup>, by 2010, of which were mainly responsible for the developed countries, producing 55% of the total carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere<sup>79</sup>. However, no limitation on greenhouse gas emissions was envisaged for developing countries, since the imposition of a restriction, impacting on energy consumption, on agriculture, on industry and on other productive sectors, would have slowed down their path towards socio-economic development.

With the adoption of the Protocol, an important result has been achieved, above all because it constitutes the first example of a legally binding global treaty in history. In particular, the aforementioned precautionary principle was applied to the possible consequences of the greenhouse effect, under which it was possible to intervene preventively, against potential, hypothetical and uncertain environmental threats, and therefore against threats on which there

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<sup>76</sup>Treaty of Amsterdam Amending The Treaty On European Union, The Treaties Establishing The European Communities And Certain Related Acts (97/C340/01), Article 2, Amsterdam, 1997.

Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:11997D/AFI>

<sup>77</sup> PALLEMAERTS M., AZMANOVA A., *The European Union and Sustainable Development: Internal and External Dimensions*, Asp / Vubpress / Upa, 2006, pp.20-25.

<sup>78</sup> including carbon dioxide, methane, nitric oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulfur hexafluoride.

<sup>79</sup> The global community set the target in terms of reducing the emissions of gases to an extent not less than 5% (on average 5.2%) compared to the emissions that were recorded in 1990 - considered as a reference year - in the period 2008 -2012. The overall reduction of 5.2% is not the same for everyone: while for the European Union countries, the reduction must be equal to 8%, for the United States the reduction must be 7% and for Japan, 6%. No reduction, but only stabilization was planned for the Russian Federation, New Zealand and Ukraine.

is no tangible evidence regarding the possibility that the ecological disaster could have actually taken place. The Protocol also identified a series of priority actions related to the phenomenon of global climate change that has become extremely relevant. These actions imposed an international collaboration on a consensual basis between the developed countries and the Eastern European countries with an economy in transition, and were based on the centrality of the problems of the global climate in the global socio-economic development. International collaboration concerned above all the exchange of the experiences, information and knowledge acquired in the implementation of the respective policies and operational measures. The EU, to incentivize the achievement of the objectives of carbon dioxide reduction in the main industrial sectors, established a new implementation tool, the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS)<sup>80</sup>, a monetary quotation mechanism of emissions and emissions trading among member states, which set a maximum ceiling for emissions allowed in the European territory in the sectors concerned which corresponds to an equivalent "shares" number (1 ton of CO<sub>2</sub>eq. = 1 share) that could be bought and sold on a specific market<sup>81</sup>. This tool was used by the EU to control emissions of pollutants and greenhouse gases at international level in order to enforce the environmental constraints imposed by the Kyoto Protocol on each State<sup>82</sup>.

Unfortunately, the Kyoto commitment was certainly not such as to decisively solve the problem of climate change, as the agreement, although it was signed by more than 160 countries, will come into force only in 2005 mainly due to Russia's reluctance, Canada and Japan, and will not be ratified by the United States, which were responsible for the global emission of over 36% of total carbon dioxide<sup>83</sup>.

Moreover, the inability of the international community to take decisions capable of bypassing specific interests in favor of the wellbeing of humanity also emerged in June 1997, when a summit convened by the UN General Assembly was held in New York ( "Rio+5") in order to assess the situation after Rio and to verify the implementation of Agenda 21 and the other commitments undertaken on that occasion.

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<sup>80</sup> Introduced and regulated in European legislation by Directive 2003/87 / EC (ETS Directive). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32003L0087>

<sup>81</sup> Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/ets\\_it](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/ets_it)

<sup>82</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.minambiente.it/pagina/emission-trading>

<sup>83</sup> CAMPBELL K., *From Rio to Kyoto: the use of voluntary agreements to implement the Climate Change Convention*, in Review of European Community and International Environmental Law, 1998, vol.7, pp. 159-170.

At the XIXth special session of the United Nations General Assembly (Rio+5) in 1997<sup>84</sup>, the governments examined progress in implementing the Rio commitments. Despite the significant progress that has been made, this verification has been characterized by general dissatisfaction with the actual degree of implementation. The Assembly recognized the unequal nature of progress, whose triggering cause was traced to the growing phenomenon of globalization which, if not managed, would have been beneficial for some countries, but not for others. If on the one hand economic growth, reinforced by globalization, had allowed several countries to reduce the level of poverty, others had witnessed a deterioration in socio-economic conditions, with an increase in income inequality and an incalculable environmental damage. Developing countries were disappointed that industrialized countries did not realize their commitments to increase aid for Official Development Assistance (ODA)<sup>85</sup> and the absence of new and additional resources sufficient to cope with the higher costs resulting from the commitment to tackle problems on a global scale. However, the Rio + 5 meeting in 1997 established two important new objectives: to achieve greater measurable progress and to have Sustainable Development strategies at national level within the deadline for the next review scheduled for 2002. From this moment on, sectors such as energy, transport and tourism, which represented the key areas of modern economies, will become the focus of European policies on Sustainable Development. Furthermore, the Assembly of member states reiterated that Agenda 21 would remain the fundamental program of action to achieve sustainable and recognized development and that the achievement of this goal would require the integration of its economic, environmental and social components. They reaffirmed their commitment to work in a spirit of global partnership in order to meet the needs of present and future generations equally and to implement the planned actions. In those statements we could glimpse what would later become one of the threads conducting the development debate: the need for coherent, agreed, strategic and synergistic action among all the public and private actors of the north and the south of the world<sup>86</sup>.

In this sense, the 1998 Cardiff summit was a key moment for redesigning the path of environmental policy. The EU Council of Ministers evaluated the Commission's proposals for

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<sup>84</sup> Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly for the Review and Evaluation of the Implementation of Agenda 21, New York, June 23-27, 1997.

Retrieved at [http://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/earthsummit\\_plus\\_5.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/earthsummit_plus_5.shtml)

<sup>85</sup> commitment agreed in the context of the Rio Conference and provided for the transfer of financial resources from the North to the South of the world through the destination of 0.7% of the GDP of each Country for Official Development Aid (ODA).

<sup>86</sup> *op.cit.*, VIÑUALES J.E., *The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: A Commentary*, OUP Oxford, 2015.

proceeding with the implementation of a strategy for integrating environmental policies into Community policies. The European Commission presented a communication on strengthening environmental integration in the context of identifying a schedule of deadlines and action that led to the adoption of strategies in nine economic sectors such as transport, agriculture, energy, industry, the internal market, fisheries, development, business general and economic and financial issues, on the subject of European energy policy, proposed specific measures and systems to monitor progress achieved<sup>87</sup>. In the field of transport, the European Commission sent a communication on the possibilities of developing a Community approach to transport and CO<sub>2</sub>, for which a unified and coordinated policy was proposed for the management of all modes of transport, especially air transport. For the industrial sector, it was hoped for the introduction of eco-sustainable production and consumption models that did not threaten the competitive capacity of European industry. A particularly delicate sector was agriculture, where the intervention of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)<sup>88</sup>, had promoted a decisive modernization but also determined a worrying deterioration of the environmental resources<sup>89</sup>. Therefore, the Commission presented on 27 January 1999 a communication to the Council ("Directions towards sustainable agriculture")<sup>90</sup> where it highlighted the need for a complete integration of environmental objectives into agricultural policy in view of the upcoming new CAP reform. Indeed, the package of agricultural and structural policy measures of the "Agenda 2000" Action Program, approved at the Berlin European Council on 26 March 1999, will incorporate this indication and establish the new course of European policy. The Common Agricultural Policy will be reformed by encouraging compatible forms of management and environmental agricultural planning, for which more extensive agricultural management methods will be supported, conservation of cultivated areas with high natural value and landscape protection. Structural policy will also be reformed, for which the aid granted on the Structural Funds will have to take account of the protection and improvement of the environment. In addition, the pre-accession instruments will be strengthened by the integration

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<sup>87</sup> On 8 June 1999 the European Commission presented a communication on the single market and the environment, in which it underlined the need to strengthen synergies between the two sectors and proposed measures to promote better integration, such as environmental taxes and eco-taxes.

<sup>88</sup> Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/50-years-of-cap/history/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/50-years-of-cap/history/index_en.htm)

<sup>89</sup> A trend reversal had already occurred in 1992, with the first reform of the CAP and accompanying measures, which paved the way for less intensive techniques, the reduction of surpluses and the launching of agri-environmental and forestation programs.

<sup>90</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES TO THE COUNCIL; THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT; THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Directions towards sustainable agriculture Brussels, 27.01.1999 COM (1999) 22 final.

of two new elements such as the accession partnership and the broader participation of the candidate countries in Community programs and the enforcement mechanisms of the Community *acquis*.

Another important Convention is the one signed in Aarhus in Denmark (1998), on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (UNECE)<sup>91</sup>. The Convention was the first instrument of international law that implemented Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration which states that:

*“Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided”<sup>92</sup>*

It constitutes a milestone in the process of integrating human rights with environmental issues. The Convention established that the citizen is the first actor in the process of change towards the promotion of Sustainable Development. The citizen must be informed about environmental issues and must be able to assess the quality of the environment in which he lives and take a position regarding the environmental changes that threaten him. The Aarhus Convention therefore recognized the fundamental human right to a healthy environment by identifying access to information, participation of citizens in decision-making processes and access to justice in environmental matters, the three pillars on which to build a new model of environmental democracy.

Environmental policies should have been based on a comparison with the social actors involved and translated into shared strategies. In this way, political decisions would be implemented with a strong consensus and better quality, since citizens and environmental associations have important knowledge about the situation of their territory and its environmental needs. Many community policies had, in fact, a relevance at urban level, and for this reason, the European Commission undertook further actions. The "EU Framework for

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<sup>91</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.unece.org/env/pp/introduction.html>

<sup>92</sup> Principle number 10 of The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992.

Action for Sustainable Urban Development" sought to ensure community action on urban issues. The Framework identified the four challenges of the European cities to which it associated the achievement of four interdependent objectives to face it, such as strengthening economic prosperity and employment in towns and cities, promoting equality, social inclusion and regeneration in urban areas protecting and improving the urban environment: towards local and global sustainability, contributing to good urban governance and local empowerment<sup>93</sup>. The "EU Framework for Action for Sustainable Urban Development" will be discussed at the Urban Forum organized by the European Commission in Vienna on November 26 and 27, 1998.

A few months later, the third European Conference on Sustainable Cities was held in Hannover where 250 authorities from 36 European countries and neighbouring regions gathered to evaluate the results achieved by the Aalborg Charter (1994) and to agree a common course of action in future developments. The document produced was the "Hannover Call of the European Municipal Leaders at the Turn of the 21st Century"<sup>94</sup> (2000) and was aimed at the International Community, the European Institutions, national and local governments, at the top of Economics and Finance and at all actors involved in the Agenda 21 program to act with a cooperative spirit, therefore representatives of public administrations more than the local authorities involved. During the conference, the local authorities also proposed to sign an experimental agreement for the use and monitoring of some common indicators to be used as evaluators of the Sustainable Development process<sup>95</sup>.

The confirmation of the need to control greenhouse gas emissions for the entire globe and to implement international relations to make the Kyoto Protocol operational was the Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP6) in The Hague (November 13-24, 2000). It aimed to reach an agreement on the effective implementation of the content of the Kyoto Protocol and in particular on rules defined for the application of the envisaged flexibility mechanisms. However, precisely because of the failure to agree on these rules, the COP6 ended with a negative result. In particular, the United States put forward a set of requests aimed at favoring broad flexibility in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, finding in this line the consensus of

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<sup>93</sup> COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, *Sustainable urban development in the European Union: a framework for action*, Brussels, 28.10.1998 COM (1998) 605 final.

<sup>94</sup> DODDS F., STRAUSS M., STRONG M.F., *Only One Earth: The Long Road Via Rio to Sustainable Development*, Routledge, 2012, pag.243.

<sup>95</sup> MESOLELLA A., *Riflessi locali delle politiche europee: governo sostenibile e agende 21 locali: il caso Modena*, Alinea Editrice, 2002, pp.82-83.



Canada, Australia, Norway, New Zealand. On the contrary, the EU and the developing countries opposed these requests, as this would reduce the actual efforts made by the various countries to contribute to the fight against global warming. During the Sixth Conference of the Parties no agreement was found, and it was decided to suspend the Conference and to convene a new session in July 2001 (COP6-bis). The failure of the Hague Conference testified a sign of the inability of governments to take on a problem with great economic implications, both for present generations and for future ones.

## *II. The Millennium Summit and the MDGs*

Turning the effects of globalization on behalf of all countries was the main challenge the world recognized in September 2000. 191 heads of state and government signed a global pact unanimously approving the Millennium Declaration during the Millennium Summit, the largest meeting of leaders of history, whose goal was to come to a definition of the role that the United Nations would have in the XXI century in leading the planet and people towards a fair and inclusive development. The Declaration laid the foundations for the adoption of global policies and measures, corresponding to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition, aimed at reducing the economic, social and environmental divide that globalization was generating. On that occasion, the leaders have come to define the six fundamental values that should have characterized international relations for the twenty-first century, such as freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility and have affirmed their duties not only towards their respective peoples, but towards the entire human species, defining a series of ambitious objectives to be achieved by 2015 called the MDGs. From this Summit, 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were born<sup>96</sup>:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability

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<sup>96</sup> Retrieved at [http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/mdg\\_goals.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/mdg_goals.html)



- Develop a global partnership for development

The 8 objectives were associated with 21 targets, which gave concrete and measurable expression to the fundamental points of the Declaration that the international community should have achieved by the end of 2015 thanks to the increase in the flow of development aid, the transfer of technology from the countries developed to those in development and to the Millennium Project, an institutional support plan for the most fragile countries<sup>97</sup>. MDGs have proved revolutionary not only because they have led to a common definition of eight absolute priorities for the following years, but also because they have often associated targets to them, giving rise to an effort to measure and quantify the *status quo* and progress tried for the first with official statistics, capable of photographing the global, the national and the local reality.

However, despite the signing of the MDGs from parts of all member countries, they did not have a binding character but only an ethical value and therefore they referred to governments, civil society and the private sector, the commitment to take concrete actions in order to pursue these goals.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Europe was far from the proper application of the Sustainable Development model outlined in the Amsterdam Treaty, which came into force in 1999, as member states had not yet fully integrated environmental policy into other sectoral policies. Moreover, from the evaluation of the results achieved up to that moment it showed that, despite the progress made, all the environmental policy measures had to be intensified. In light of this, the European Commission proposed the sixth Environmental Action Program that should have taken into account the significant change in scenario with the entry into Europe of the new countries. The Sixth Environmental Action Program set the environmental objectives and priorities that will form an integral part of the European Community Strategy for Sustainable Development and for environmental policies from 2001 to 2010. The program focused on priority issues identified in climate change, nature and biodiversity, the environment and health and the sustainable management of natural resources and waste. Environmental assessments were extended, the right to access environmental information, environmental responsibility, management systems and environmental certification represented the new tools introduced. It was the first Environmental Action Program adopted in co-decision by the Parliament and the European Council that introduced elements of discontinuity with respect to previous Environmental Action Programs, proposing a new

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<sup>97</sup> SACHS J. D., MCARTHUR J. W., «The Millennium Project: a plan for meeting the Millennium Development Goals», in *The Lancet*, 2005, pp.347-353.

strategic approach, focused more on new methods of implementing policies than on specific actions. The environmental action of the European Union aimed to favor the decoupling of the consumption of resources from economic growth, the dematerialization of the economy and the prevention of the production of waste, promoting the right to a healthy environment.

While on the one hand it was recognized that with the adoption of the Environmental Action Programs a new approach to environmental problems was introduced at European level based on the integration of environmental policy into other Community policies, making it transversal, on the other hand, the context in the new program was becoming increasingly complex as the entry of new countries into the EU required the Community to undertake a broader intervention to adequately support the new countries in implementing an environmental policy. The member countries, now become 28, were maturing the awareness that maintaining those rhythms and growth patterns, in the coming decades, would have exacerbated the phenomena of environmental degradation and the consequent damage to health. Precisely for this reason, environmental policy will be in this new Action Program, the fundamental pillar of European action. It became necessary to intervene in a profound way to change consumption habits and production patterns. The program therefore proposed a new strategic action aimed at improving the implementation of existing legislation, integrating environmental issues into all political, economic and social strategies to induce the market to work for the environment<sup>98</sup>. The EU action was aimed at connecting all thematic strategies to contribute to a high level of protection of the environment and human health. Therefore, the EU strongly presupposed the assumption of common but differentiated responsibilities and forced to redefine the production processes and above all the traditional decision-making processes in order to promote Sustainable Development.

The end of the 1990s saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ambitious European Monetary Union project will provide new impetus for development. At the beginning of the new millennium, the need for a paradigm shift was imposed in the EU, which focused on the need to adopt a single strategy for coordinating national economic policies.

In this direction, on 23 and 24 March 2000, the Heads of State and Government of the then fifteen Member States, gathered in an extraordinary session in Lisbon to launch a new and detailed program of action for development with the aim of making the EU,

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<sup>98</sup> LANGLET D., MAHMOUDI S., *EU Environmental Law and Policy*, Oxford University Press, 2016, pag.31.

*“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”<sup>99</sup>”*

by 2010. The so-called 'Lisbon Strategy' concerned a series of cross-cutting measures across several sectors, which comprised a real action plan to increase the competitiveness of the EU with the aim of achieving sustainable economic growth and greater cohesion within the EU. In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, a series of structural reforms were launched in the fields of employment, innovation, economic reform, social cohesion and the environment, through actions aimed at promoting scientific research, education, access to the Internet, the modernization of social security systems, raising the employment rate and environmental sustainability. The Lisbon Strategy had the merit of identifying the economic and social dimensions as the two main pillars of European politics.

However, the Lisbon Strategy revealed itself as an overly ambitious project that did not consider the emerging countries in the world market and in fact, the Lisbon Strategy will be updated annually reviewing working methods and priorities.

The partial failure of the Lisbon Strategy was attributable to the excessive number of targets and as confirmed by the “Kok Report”, the implementation of the primary objectives set by the Lisbon Strategy, should have been inspired by three fundamental principles such as attention to the impact on the territory of European policies; broad participation and sharing in the definition of the purposes; simplification and rationalization in the implementation of the Strategy. The Kok Report proposed a governance that more closely involved social partners and institutional actors. Indeed, the European Council should have guided the Strategy, the member states should have committed themselves to implementing European policies, the Commission should have monitored and supported the policies of the sector, the European Parliament should have played a more proactive role<sup>100</sup>.

One year after the Lisbon summit, to strengthen the European will to continue the common effort for environmentally sustainable development, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) is approved. The European Council of Helsinki, in December 1999, had invited the European Commission to elaborate a long-term strategy proposal for the coordination of Sustainable Development policies in the economic, social and ecological fields. The proposal, presented on May 15, 2001, was approved at the Göteborg European Council in June 2001 and

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<sup>99</sup> The conclusions of the European Council of Lisbon.

Retrieved at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1\\_it.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_it.htm)

<sup>100</sup> COSTANTINI V., ANGELI F., *Gli obiettivi ambientali nella strategia europea di Lisbona*, QA, Milano, 2005.

had the merit of definitively inserting the environmental dimension into the process of Sustainable Development, which ratified the third pillar of the European policy that was to be added the first two pillars, social and economic, defined by the Lisbon Strategy. This proposal will be defined as the European Strategy for Sustainable Development (SDS), which outlined a strategy focused on problems that represented a serious or irreversible threat to the future well-being of the EU and it was erected as inspiring policy in all sectors and changes in the behavior of businesses and consumers. European countries should have conceived a unitary and coherent political action to achieve common goals. Again, sectoral policies should have been geared towards achieving common energy use targets to limit climate change, the protection of public health, the responsible management of natural resources and land use. An interesting aspect that emerged was the dynamic trait of the SDS, which recognized the long-term nature of Sustainable Development and the need to periodically adjust the strategy according to the results achieved and social changes<sup>101</sup>.

The actions and strategies proposed and put in place since 2000 could not fail to take into account the change taking place within the EU started with the enlargement process, which highlighted three fundamental issues, peculiar to the phenomenon of globalization, such as; the need for cohesion deriving from the increase in social, environmental and territorial inequalities; the presence of new balances between EU member countries due to the shifting of the cohesion policy center towards the east; the worsening of the employment and environmental situation, especially in some regions where these are accompanied by obsolete economic systems and in strong decline. Underlying the EU's strategic change was the belief that the impact of globalization required a radical transformation of the European economy, while respecting the values and concepts of society. This transformation could only be achieved by improving information, research and development policies and by accelerating the process of structural reform to improve competitiveness and innovation. The Göteborg European Council therefore invited member states to outline their national strategies for Sustainable Development, underlining the importance of a broad consultation of all stakeholders.

Despite good intentions, the process of implementing the Göteborg Strategy and the sixth Environmental Action Program were not taken into account as was logical to expect. On the contrary, the European policy on Sustainable Development focused mainly on the Lisbon Strategy themes: growth, competitiveness, employment.

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<sup>101</sup> Retrieved at <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/>

More generally, there was a possible contradiction between the main objective of the Lisbon Strategy, that is to achieve an EU economic growth as strong as possible, and pursue Sustainable Development, which was given a marginal and imprecise qualification regarding the mechanisms of formation of political guidelines for its implementation. This is complemented by the inertia of the member states, which are also responsible for the lack of effectiveness of the strategic plan set up in Lisbon. Starting from these findings, in March 2002, the Barcelona European Council urged the Commission to rationalize the processes of policy coordination and to focus on their implementation, rather than on the annual development of the guidelines.

Nevertheless, the new millennium opened a new phase of the process of Sustainable Development within the EU. In this new phase of this process, the EU was proposing itself socially cohesive and in the role of protagonist. Commitment to sustainable development and sustainability therefore found a formal recognition at European level that went beyond the scope of policies and became a key objective of the European Union, although sustainable development was not considered as an inspiring and overarching concept of European policy, capable of an overall and involving approach.

In this perspective, the EU, during the eighth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-8) met at UN Headquarters in New York from 24 April to 5 May 2000<sup>102</sup>, proposed to include in the program of the work of the Summit of Johannesburg, which was planned for 2002, several topics such as:

- the connection between poverty and the environment in the social dimension of Sustainable Development;
- stop the decline of natural resources through greater efficiency in their use;
- environmental safety and the potential threat of conflicts due to environmental pressures;
- implement appropriate initiatives for Sustainable Development at national and local level

After the first half of the 1990s, the European Commission was more interested in adopting measures to support Sustainable Development, resorting to mediation with other institutional actors to start a global governance that could manage the main problems overall. The European Commission, by virtue of its power of legislative initiative, together with DG

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<sup>102</sup> Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/intergovernmental/csd8>

Environment<sup>103</sup>, played a central role in European environmental policy, promoting policies aimed at achieving a high level of environmental protection and quality of life in the EU, and the assessment, in close cooperation with the EU Court of Justice, of the correct application of environmental law in the various member states, the representation of the EU in international organizations and conferences concerning the environment, the provision of funding and the dissemination of information to the public.

With the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, officially signed in February 2001 following the European Council of Nice (2000), the perspective of environmental protection assumed a constitutional character. In the preamble of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which came into force in February 2003, it is reiterated that among the objectives of the member countries,

*“The Union contributes to the preservation and to the development of these common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe as well as the national identities of the Member States and the organisation of their public authorities at national, regional and local levels; it seeks to promote balanced and sustainable development and ensures free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, and the freedom of establishment<sup>104</sup>”*

The Charter also reaffirmed the need to maintain a high level of environmental protection and in order to improve its quality, these needs should have been vigorously integrated into EU policies and guaranteed in accordance with the principle of Sustainable Development.

Considering the progress made and while defending important positions and actions and engaging in the ratification of numerous international treaties, protocols and conventions on the environment, the EU was struggling to set up that urgent change of direction to alleviate environmental problems and redefining economic and financial processes. If on the one hand, the failure of the Hague Conference had testified a sign of the inability of world governments to take on a problem with great economic implications, on the other hand, the COP6-bis, held in Bonn in July 2001, had confirmed the distance of strategic position between the EU and the

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<sup>103</sup> DG Environment is one of forty-one Directorates General that make up the European Commission and it is responsible for the European Union policy area of the environment. The DG's main role is to initiate and define new environmental legislation and to ensure that measures, which have been agreed, are actually put into practice in the member states of the European Union. Retrieved at [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/index_en.htm)

<sup>104</sup> CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (2000/C), Official Journal of the European Communities, C 364/8, 18 December 2000.

main industrialized countries. For instance, the United States, to which other developed countries had also aligned, had in fact definitively emerged from the commitments made with the Kyoto Protocol on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Inevitably, a central element of the credibility of the EU in the coming years, was the ability to be a significant global player in determining the achievement of the objectives to contain climate change by increasing the average temperature of the earth by no more than 2°C, managing to build a global governance that involves the main players responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases (United States, China, India, Russia, Brazil) and also the developing countries, reluctant to environmental limits in order to avoid potential restrictions to their economic growth.

However, the Kyoto Protocol, endorsed during the Rio Conference (1992), was signed by the EU in 1997 but ratified only in May 2002. Since January 2005, all EU governments had set a ceiling for their carbon dioxide emissions. Nevertheless, companies that produced emissions above the authorized threshold, could compensate for their excesses by buying emission allowances from companies that instead, had managed to reduce their emissions levels<sup>105</sup>. As a matter of fact, the Kyoto Protocol came into force on February 2005, with the ratification of Russia at the end of 2004 and the expected achievement of the share, coinciding with a set of countries responsible for at least 55% of emissions total in 1990. Therefore, almost 8 years after the signing of the Protocol.

Despite the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, many states have seen the pollution produced worsen and pursuing this objective remained a critical situation. On a global level, although the EU continues to be one of the most active international actors in the environmental field, the international conventions which, up until the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 had followed one another after Rio, turned out to be mostly an occasion for long discussions and of mere declarations of intent.

Between September 2001 and June 2002, in preparation for the Johannesburg Summit, which would take place in 2002, numerous intergovernmental meetings were held on a geographical and international basis, in which the participating States were able to suggest the most significant aspects that should have emerged from the Summit. Despite the differences in regional priorities, some points returned as common goals, and testified the main problems to be overcome at international level on the road to sustainability. From the preparatory meetings

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<sup>105</sup> Directive 2004/101 / EC of the European Parliament has allowed the recognition of credits to the benefit of companies engaged in projects to reduce emissions in other countries by converting them into quotas to be used in a Community emissions trading system or EU ETS (European Emissions Trading Scheme).

to the Summit, peace and security were considered fundamental prerequisites for the pursuit of Sustainable Development.

Nevertheless, it was found that, starting from Rio, the process towards a Sustainable Development had progressed above all at the international level, with few and precise initiatives at the level of individual States. It was in fact, through the latter, that the real implementation of the commitments undertaken at international level on the individual issues of Sustainable Development would have to pass. However, the EU turned out to be the one who, more than the others, had succeeded in a more effective way to give life to concrete initiatives, at least from a political point of view.

It is worth noting that, the gigantic mechanism of the United Nations, accompanied by a General Assembly and multiple commissions, programs, research institutes, agencies, Secretariats, Conferences of the Parties (COP), technical bodies, working groups, groups of experts, systems and informative instruments, had, until then, produced a lot of documentation of excellent technical-scientific and diplomatic level, but few tangible results. The process launched in Rio could have allowed the implementation of binding instruments, or at least more stringent than those achieved, which are relevant for sustainable development of a global, regional or cross-border nature, such as the process of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IUPGRFA)<sup>106</sup>, the international conventions on the sea<sup>107</sup> and against cross-border pollution and those for the protection of flora and fauna or the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer<sup>108</sup>. Probably, the complexity of the processes of implementation of Sustainable Development had discouraged the intention of the individual states to commit for something that would exceed territorial boundaries, giving, in this sense, priority to national political interests rather than to the environment in the its complex. While many UN bodies have set up scientific support committees for decision-making at international level, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>109</sup>, at national level the policies remained largely compartmentalised and linked to a short-term strategic vision that did not take into account the limited availability of resources, although the transversality of the environmental issue in all the productive sectors had been ascertained.

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<sup>106</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/it/>

<sup>107</sup> e.g. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) retrieved at [http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/convention\\_overview\\_convention.htm](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_convention.htm)

<sup>108</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development/environment-and-natural-capital/montreal-protocol.html>

<sup>109</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.ipcc.ch/>



More recently, in 1999, the National Research Council (NCR), defined the idea of Sustainable Development as:

*“The reconciliation of society’s developmental goals with the planet’s environmental limits over the long term<sup>110</sup>”*

However, in most developing countries, it was difficult to reconcile the need to reduce poverty without harming the environment. Therefore, it was not coincidence that in Johannesburg the issues to be addressed were extended. Together with the environmental aspect of Sustainable Development, the central theme of Rio, social and economic problems will be widely discussed, with particular attention to the issue of poverty reduction<sup>111</sup>.

### *III. Johannesburg Conference: the international commitment for the future*

The expectations of improvement and rapprochement with the model so coveted of Sustainable Development that the various interventions of the international community should have raised ten years from the UNCED of Rio, emerged during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg by 26 August to 4 September 2002. The UN General Assembly declared that the purpose of this World Summit was precisely to verify the state of implementation of the commitments undertaken in Rio ten years earlier and to detect the objectives set by the United Nations in the Millennium Declaration of September 2000.

Unfortunately, little progress has been made on the road to Sustainable Development. The expectations hoped for at the beginning of the new millennium, did not find confirmation in reality. Since then, progress has been extremely slow and the situation in the global environment was still far from satisfactory.

The Rio summit, though provoking global awareness of environmental priorities and triggering a number of successful institutional processes, paving the way for environmentally compatible development, had not produced tangible global results anyway, against a considerable increase in pollution and the loss of natural resources that had occurred in these ten years. As stressed

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<sup>110</sup> National Research Council Board on Sustainable Development, *Our Common Journey, a Transition Toward Sustainability*. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C, 1999, pag 2.

<sup>111</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament entitled Ten years after Rio: preparing for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (COM (2001) 53 – C5-0342/2001 – 2001/2142(COS)). Retrieved at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP/TEXT+REPORT+A5-2002-0151+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

by the UN Secretary-General of the time, Kofi Annan, people living in extreme poverty were estimated to be over a billion and the debts of poor countries had grown. The fundamental need to radically change the patterns of production and consumption, the basic concept of the Rio summit, had been almost ignored as the state of the planet was getting worse. The continuous increase in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and the inexorable decline of forests, testified that the progress achieved in recent years in terms of improving the environment and Sustainable Development have been minimal<sup>112</sup>.

After the Rio summit, as the Secretary-General observed in his speech 'Towards a Sustainable Future', delivered at the Annual Environmental Conference held in New York on May 14, 2002, the hope was to no longer consider environmental protection as a luxury, but to integrate it into economic and social issues and that the rich countries would have supported the developing countries even more to fight poverty and to avoid taking a path of polluting development<sup>113</sup>. It was a different world from the Rio summit, which suffered the consequences of the aggravation of the global environmental crisis, the widening of the gap between rich elites and poor masses, of 11 September and wars, now widespread, global and permanent.

Faced with this reality, which bears evident signs of how the pressure on natural resources and the production of pollution have increased, Kofi Annan reiterated that the summit's mandate should be to commit to open a new chapter of empowerment, partnership and concrete action:

*“if there is one word that should be on everyone’s lips at this summit, one concept that embodies everything we hope to achieve here in Johannesburg, it is responsibility. (...) Responsibility for our planet, whose bounty is the very basis for human well-being and progress. (...) Unsustainable practices are woven deeply into the fabric of modern life. Some say we should rip up that fabric. I say we can and must weave in new strands of knowledge and cooperation. (...) Civil society groups have a critical role, as partners, advocates and watchdogs”<sup>114</sup>*

The Secretary General recognized the essentiality of the relationship between human beings and the environment in the process of Sustainable Development. In addition, he faced the

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<sup>112</sup> GARDNER G., *The challenge for Johannesburg: Creating a More Secure World*, in L.Starke (ed.), *State of the World 2002: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society* (New York: W.W. Norton), 2002, pp.3-23.

<sup>113</sup> The speech "Towards a sustainable future" pronounced by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan during the Annual Conference on the Environment held in New York on May 14, 2002.

<sup>114</sup> Address by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2 September 2002, UN Press Release SG/SM/8358, AFR/468, ENV/DEV/693, 3 September 2002. Retrieved at : <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2002-09-03/secretary-general-kofi-annan-world-summit-sustainable-development>

inevitable evidence of the failure of the obsolete global development model that continued to perpetrate, which was responsible for producing an increasingly clear split between the rich and the poor of the world, finally focusing on the centrality of Sustainability in achievement of all other MDGs.

*“Over the past decade, at conferences and summit meetings such as this one, the world has drawn up a far-reaching blueprint for a stable, prosperous twenty-first century. This summit, like its landmark predecessors in Stockholm and Rio de Janeiro, focuses on a key component of that blueprint: the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. (...) And let us face an uncomfortable truth: the model of development we are accustomed to has been fruitful for the few but flawed for the many. A path to prosperity that ravages the environment and leaves a majority of humankind behind in squalor will soon prove to be a dead-end road for everyone(..)That includes the Millennium Development Goals. Sustainability is one of those goals. But it is also a prerequisite for reaching all of the others<sup>115</sup>”*

With this awareness, the Heads of State and Government of the 191 participating countries, numerous representatives of local authorities and over 700 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) formally reaffirmed their commitment to achieving Sustainable Development by adopting a document that summarize the object and the methods of implementation. Surprisingly, for the first time, the policy was flanked by the private sector, thanks to the presentation of UN Global Compact to stimulate global companies to adopt sustainable policies and catalyze actions in support of the UN within an ideal unitary framework, articulated in ten principles, in order to renew the global economy, making it more inclusive and sustainable. The ten principles concerned above all human rights, work, the environment and the fight against corruption. Kofi Annan himself, he announced that *“Without the private sector, sustainable development will remain only a distant dream. We are not asking corporations to do something different from their normal business; we are asking them to do their normal business differently<sup>116</sup>”*.

The WSSD, produced as a final document, the Resolution A/CONF. 199/20, adopted on September 4, 2002, which consisted of a political declaration, "The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development from our origins to the future", and an annex "Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development". A global pact on

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*

Sustainable Development, for which the signatory states expressed their desire to achieve the fundamental objectives of eradicating poverty, changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns and protecting and managing natural resources. It was also intended to fill some of the important gaps that had hampered the implementation of Agenda 21 and to address issues not adequately discussed at the Earth Summit, such as energy and patterns of production and consumption.

Essentially, the WSSD of Johannesburg has sought to address the central issue of how to achieve economic and social development, but above all how to make it sustainable with respect to the environment and the future of mankind. A central point of this reflection was the reference to the three dimensions of the economy, the environment and society, fundamental bases from which to find a human balance between socioeconomic development and environmental protection and observing the real application of Agenda 21.

"The Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development" was designated for the implementation of the commitments originally made to UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) and concretely defined some priority objectives towards the achievement of a Sustainable Development. They concerned:

- cooperation, for which it was decided to allocate 0.7% of GDP of the rich countries to a solidarity fund and 562 bilateral projects were established between industrialized and poor countries related to different areas of intervention (between which poverty, renewable energy, purification of water), for the implementation of which, expected in the space of ten years, were initially allocated 1.500 million euro. Collaboration also, between civil society and private sector, as an instrument integrating governmental action aimed at pursuing sustainable development.
- water resources, in relation to which the commitment was made to halve, by 2015, the number of people who did not have access to drinking water and sanitation, which at the time were about 2.4 billion.
- the protection of biodiversity, through a significant reduction, by 2010, of the rate of extinction of the variety of living species, and the maintenance of the abundance and variety of fish species, devastated by fishing techniques that did not respect the breeding periods;
- energy, for which the member states have committed themselves, albeit in a very general manner, to a substantial increase in the use of renewable energy;

- elimination of toxic and harmful chemicals by 2020, especially pesticides used in agriculture;
- the climate, in relation to which the commitments made in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have been reaffirmed. With particular reference to the Kyoto Protocol, the countries that had proved hostile were urged to ratify.

"The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development from our origins to the future", also reaffirmed the commitments signed in previous Summits on Sustainable Development highlighting the interdependencies between environmental and social problems. It affirmed the urgent need to reconcile the economic and civil progress of the populations with the requirements of environmental protection. Among the primary objectives to be achieved was the eradication of poverty, underlining the importance of reducing the contrast that divided society between rich and poor.

Apparently, in the documents produced in Johannesburg the priority of economic growth was no longer affirmed, but rather to embark on Sustainable Development by stressing the indispensability of three equally important and closely linked pillars such as economic development, environmental protection and social progress, the latter challenged by the issue of poverty eradication. In Johannesburg, more emphasis was put on establishing partnerships and defining new government agreements as the main tools for implementing the MDGs. It was also confirmed that for the achievement of a Sustainable Development, the involvement and interaction of different sectors was essential. The political sphere, scientific research, technological development, the economic and social world were all equally important to achieve an improvement of human well-being in respect of the environment, since the concept of Sustainable Development underpinned a dynamic process of continuous adaptation to a reality that was changing.

Despite the importance of the objectives set at the Johannesburg summit, its preparation and development took place in a climate of strong skepticism. The stakeholders presented themselves at the Summit with different objectives and expectations. The United States, at the time governed by George W. Bush, criticized the commitments proposed by the EU as unattainable or too expensive. An indicative factor in this sense was once again the disengagement of the United States<sup>117</sup> and other industrialized countries, an attitude for which,

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<sup>117</sup> which did not want to set any targets on the subject of renewable energy

official documents and declarations signed, would always remain empty proclamation of intent. The lack of concreteness of the agreements reached showed the unwillingness of the national governments to actively engage on the debated issues despite their full awareness of the alarming diagnosis on the state of the environment just received, thus leaving an apparent disappointment and perplexity about the effectiveness of the Johannesburg summit. Once again, the industrialized countries, which should have activated themselves and become spokesmen more than others to change the route, refused to leave the traditional patterns that were feeding obsolete visions of socio-economic development, which forged the interests of a few, undermining the credibility of the summit from the beginning.

The environmentalists, whose priority was the relaunch of the Kyoto Protocol, the rejection of the globalization of the markets and the conversion of the production and consumption model of the industrialized countries, were very critical. At the end of the conference, in fact, many environmentalist delegations controversially left the Summit before its conclusion, as the topics of their greatest interest remained at the margins of the discussions, which focused mainly on the priorities of poverty and health. Developing countries, for their part, hoped that the Summit would follow more economic aid.

Ten years later, after the limits shown by the Rio summit, passing through the failure of the Kyoto Protocol, too many expectations risked being disregarded again. The international choices, necessary to mark an inversion of the unsustainable tendency of development, could not be manifested only as laudable intentions without substantial decisions following<sup>118</sup>.

Unfortunately, the WSSD was part of a corporate context in which the footprint of globalization was strongly imposing and in which market laws were significantly influencing global governance. An era inflated by the myth of well-being in which it was difficult to glimpse a space for a real protection of the environment, which not only did not produce profit, but rather represented an economic cost for governments. Moreover, it was an extremely delicate historical moment due to the genesis of international terrorism following the events of 11 September, but it was also true that an incontrovertible cause was the lack of a single approach between the financial, commercial, investment, technology and policy systems, based on short-term rather than long-term considerations, as well as in order to pursue Sustainable Development.

However, in terms of sensitizing the world public opinion, the outcome of the Johannesburg summit had the merit of allowing the themes of development and the

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<sup>118</sup> SERAFINI M., *Dopo Johannesburg. Fallimenti e speranze*, in La rivista del manifesto, n. 32, October 2002.

environment issues to acquire a different value. Concern for the health of the environment was beginning to be a mass experience as well as a now widely shared scientific conviction. The wide media coverage that had the summit, which was attended by about 4,000 members of the press, gave global importance to the debated issues, certainly constituting a positive aspect for the world public opinion. There was widespread awareness in the world that the commitment to the urgent challenges to be faced was independent of the adequacy of the approved documents and of the decisions taken but depended first of all on the commitment of each individual citizen. The great issues faced in Johannesburg, which denounced the impact of economic growth on the planet's capacity and the waste of resources by the industrialized countries, had brought to light the existence of common goods of global interest, called 'global commons' that needed protection from everyone's part. This represented the global awareness that natural resources for future development could not be compromised for contingent economic needs and this evidence began to gather wide sharing. Unlike the Rio summit, following which the denunciation of the problems substantially aroused the attention of the scientific world, Johannesburg aroused therefore a sensitization of the world public opinion.

A further turning point seemed to emerge, revealing that the real problem to be faced was political. In order to concretely implement a paradigm shift, we could not bypass the need to establish stronger world governance could not be bypassed, give more weight to multilateralism and involve the entire world community in important decisions. The instrument of international cooperation was indispensable for a global implementation of Sustainable Development<sup>119</sup>.

Having participated so actively in the process of defining and applying the principles of sustainable development, for the EU the 2002 Johannesburg summit was a moment of verification of the work carried out at international level and a confrontation on the difficulties in applying its principles. On these issues, the EU's tendency has been to continue to play a leading role both for European Union member countries and for the entire Euro-Mediterranean area, as well as for continuing the many activities linked to international cooperation.

One of the greatest difficulties encountered by the EU in implementing the Rio principles was its financial availability. Within the European context, this difficulty reflected negatively on technology transfer. This difficulty reinforced the need for a robust and ambitious European Sustainable Development strategy, which would represent the synthesis of the

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<sup>119</sup> HENS L., NATH B, *The World Summit on Sustainable Development: The Johannesburg Conference*, Springer Science & Business Media, 2006, pp.300-305.

sectoral strategies launched in Cardiff in 1998, the Environmental Action Programs and effective action plans for biodiversity, development, climate change and chemicals substances. Equally vital were the activities linked to development cooperation, the European Union set out to implement programs within six areas deemed crucial, such as trade and development; regional integration and cooperation; support for macroeconomic policies and social sectors; transports; food security and sustainable rural development; the creation of institutional capacity and good governance.

The countries of the European Union defended the reasons for environmentalism and came out satisfied with the WSSD of Johannesburg, having managed to close the Summit with an agreement, avoiding a break that would have weighed on international relations for many years<sup>120</sup>.

The United Nations Summit in Johannesburg reiterated the call for States to progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies and to start their implementation by 2005. This is the context for the publication of the European Commission' communication '2004 Environmental Policy Review'<sup>121</sup>, dedicated to the review of the current Community environmental policy. In this document entitled "Consolidating the environmental pillar of sustainable development", the Commission analyzed the state of application of the environmental principles identified by the VI Environmental Action Program and represented a re-examination of the principles announced in Johannesburg. The European Commission's communication outlined the five main challenges that Community environmental policy would have to face in the new context and concerning the full integration of the environmental dimension into other policies; the development of regulations that are beneficial both for the environment and for the economy; promoting sustainable development by all levels of government, making EU enlargement a success for the environment; leverage the credibility gained by the EU to promote Sustainable Development worldwide. Furthermore, since the environment has no borders, the EU had expressed its commitment to the international dimension of the environmental question and to the promotion of the environment outside its territory.

However, despite important progress, the application of the Kyoto principles was only just beginning and, in some sectors, such as transport, the issue of emissions is still a worrying

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<sup>120</sup> *op.cit.*, PALLEMAERTS M., AZMANOVA A., pp.105-108.

<sup>121</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION of 27 January 2005 – "2004 Environmental Policy Review" COM (2005) 17 - Official Journal C 98 of 23 April 2004.



aspect, as was the rate of biodiversity loss. The implementation of environmental policy remained the great challenge of the future for the EU.

The European response to this need will take place in 2005 with the process of revising the European Strategy for Sustainable Development which was based on the evaluation of the previous strategy. The progresses made in implementing the strategy were analyzed every year, but the 2005 revision, which coincides with the establishment of a new European Commission and with an ever-increasing emphasis on the Lisbon Strategy in order to increase the competitiveness of the Union it was more in-depth and broader. In the first decade of the century, the Lisbon Strategy had in fact represented the framework of the public policies of the European Union influencing, at the same time, the action of Governments and, in some cases, the reforms of the regulations of the individual member states. In Lisbon an ambitious project had been launched, the Strategy in 2000 was the most explicit declaration of a united Europe to compare its model with the rest of the world, in a rapidly changing and multipolar scenario, increasingly globalized after 1989. The function of the Lisbon Strategy was to have given a decisive impetus to the European policy for innovation and research.

Nevertheless, the Lisbon Strategy had shown clear difficulties in its implementation, due to a difficult to understand programming framework, which did not favour the effective formulation of political guidelines at Community level. Furthermore, the hierarchy of objectives was lost in the multiplicity of indicators used to monitor the results achieved, thus losing effectiveness. In short, what can be defined as 'governance without government', where the elaboration and communication of political guidelines between the Community institutions and those of the member states is not supported by adequate instruments. So much so that, in 2005, halfway through the path originally agreed, the Strategy appears to be a substantial failure.

The process of relaunching the Lisbon Strategy starts from Brussels on 22 and 23 March 2005 and proposed to give new impetus to the European strategy. The Lisbon Strategy is thus the subject of a first significant revival, which mainly concerned the redefinition of some targets and spread more markedly to the social as well as economic aspects. In particular, in 2005 the Heads of State and Government of the European Union decided to reformulate the Lisbon Strategy according to two perspectives: economic growth and employment, for which were defined the broad guidelines for economic policies to be implemented at the national level. These two objectives represented the key to freeing up the resources needed to achieve the EU's ambitions in the economic, social and environmental fields and thus for the success of the whole Lisbon Strategy. The economies of the member states of the Union should have

been more competitive and the less prosperous regions should have been in line with the stronger economies. The emphasis was on more investment in research, education, the transport system, renewable energy sources, and improving employment both in terms of growth and quality. In practice, it becomes a framework for the composition of traditional policies, included in the transversal dimension of Sustainable Development, favouring actions for competitiveness, growth, employment and territorial cohesion. The re-launch of 2005 redefined objectives and procedures, providing for a two-cycle sequence, 2005-2008 and 2008-2010. In this perspective, the European Commission identified three main priorities which in turn were realized in ten fields of action:

1. Making EU capable of attracting investment and employment - expanding and strengthening the internal market, improving Community and national legislation with infrastructure reforms in regulation and market integration, ensuring open and competitive markets inside and outside EU, expand and improve European infrastructure;
2. Knowledge and innovation - knowledge understood as a 'common good' that should have been raised the innovative and competitive capacity of the European production system, increasing the level and quality of spending on research and development and the dissemination of new information and communication technologies, the sustainable use of resources to guarantee Sustainable Development;
3. growth in employment levels with policies aimed at encouraging the participation of citizens and social partners, improving the flexibility of companies and labour markets, through investments in human capital.

In terms of governance, the most relevant innovation concerned the integrated approach in the process of coordination of economic and employment policies, both at European and national level. The relaunching of the Lisbon Strategy was envisaged as a crucial political pattern in the construction of a model of development and cohesion. The relaunch of the Lisbon strategy proposed the definitive integration of the Lisbon Strategy with that of Göteborg and was strongly inscribed in the global vision of Sustainable Development that allows the continuous improvement of the quality of life of current and future generations through the creation of sustainable communities capable to manage and use resources effectively and to exploit the potential for ecological and social innovation in the economy, ensuring prosperity, protection of the environment and social cohesion. The results of the Strategy could only be achieved

through close collaboration between member states. In this general context, important changes and simplifications are introduced in the instruments necessary to meet the objectives set by the Strategy. The areas to be assessed with the indicator system became five: labor market; social cohesion; training; innovation; environment. In the revival of 2005 emerged the most incisive and authoritative role of the European Commission, strengthened in its technical legitimacy and the responsibility of the European Council that remained the institution that decided on the evaluation of state policies and priority addresses, in a constant dialogue with the Commission and with the Member States. The Council also launched the integrated and sustainable European ‘2020 climate & energy package’ policy, which will lead to a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; realization of 20% of consumption with renewable energy sources; 20% increase in energy efficiency<sup>122</sup>. The Commission and the Council could thus enrich the contents of the Strategy, with reference to Sustainable Development, social solidarity, energy efficiency and environmental protection.

In a broader perspective, it is stressed that at this time the accent was placed on Sustainable Development through the Green Economy<sup>123</sup>, which will become, for example, a priority element of the electoral program, and then of government of the ex-President of the United States of America Barak Obama. His establishment at the White House seemed to be taking a turnaround in US environmental policy and especially in the approach to environmental global governance, given his political will to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the US and to invest in research and development of renewable energy to stimulate the Green Economy. This demonstrates that environmental sustainability became a determining factor, at least in official documents, of the new global scenario, to the point of raising some important questions on the validity of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), an indicator of the economic performance of States. The feeling that it was dawning was that probably GDP, was no longer the appropriate tool to assess the quality of the development of countries, especially when compared to the social and economic conditions of some classes of the world population, but also to comply with minimum guarantee standards of fundamental human rights.

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<sup>122</sup> The targets were set by EU leaders in 2007 and enacted in legislation in 2009. They were also headline targets of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The 2020 package is a set of binding legislation to ensure the EU meets its climate and energy targets for the year 2020.

Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020_en)

<sup>123</sup> UNEP has defined the green economy as “one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. It is low carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive” (UNEP, 2011)

The relaunch of the Lisbon Strategy, in this sense, broadened the analysis to the global scenario, proposing the EU to play a much more active role in the field of energy and the environment.

However, in 2008, at the end of the first cycle, progress in the individual areas was unfortunately modest despite the great and positive effort by member states and the EC to work together for sustainability. The break-up of the international financial crisis from December 2007 to June 2009 partly nullified the progress made in the decade and it highlighted the limits of the reform process undertaken. Added to this was the persistence of strong asymmetries between the economies of the various countries, especially those in the East, following the enlargement of the EU.

The second cycle of relaunching of the Lisbon Strategy reiterated the strategic role of cohesion policy, increasingly central to the strengthening and modernization of the internal market, with the aim of making the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy of the world by 2010. Overall, the Strategy had a positive influence on the EU, promoting Community actions in response to the main challenges and helped to create a broad consensus on the reforms needed by the EU, although the latter had a rhythm of slow and unequal implementation. The Lisbon experience promoted the exchange of best practices among member countries, taking into account the interdependence of individual national economies in an increasingly integrated economic and social context<sup>124</sup>.

One of the most dramatic phases of the global crisis coincided in Europe with the entry into force on 1 December 2009 of the Lisbon Treaty of 2007. It amends the Maastricht Treaty (1993), known in updated European Union Treaty (2007) or TEU, and the Treaty of Rome (1957), known in the updated form as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2007) or TFEU<sup>125</sup>.

As we have seen, with the relaunch of the Lisbon Strategy, both in the first cycle but even more so in the second, knowledge became a fundamental element for individual growth and social capital. The technological discoveries and the increase of its digital form focused the knowledge as a common and at the same time strategic asset for the Sustainable Development of the community. On this basis, the freedom of movement of knowledge will be

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<sup>124</sup> BARNES P.M., HOERBER T.C., *Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe: The Evolution of the Discourse on Sustainability*, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>125</sup> Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community (OJ C 306, 17.12.2007); entry into force on 1 December 2009.  
Retrieved at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT>

recognized in 2007, as the fifth freedom, which was added to the traditional four freedom of movement of goods, services, people and capital.

In this sense, the Lisbon Treaty provided a legal basis for the strategy of the knowledge economy. This Treaty strengthened and clarified the scope of European environmental policy aimed at ensuring Sustainable Development. In particular, it recognized the unified role that the EU should have in participating in international action to combat climate change, stating that on environmental issues the vote is no longer unanimously but by a qualified majority and, moreover, extends the total environmental regulation to climate change. The Treaty of Lisbon was the result of the troubled reform process inaugurated at the Laeken Council in 2001 and provided for the extension of the external dimension of the EU's environmental responsibilities (Title XX, Articles 191-193 TFEU), such as safeguarding, the protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, the protection of human health, the prudent and rational use of natural resources. On the international level, the promotion of measures aimed at solving the problems of the environment, the safety and well-being of European citizens and of the global community, especially by enhancing its action to combat climate change and providing for a common energy policy (Title XXI, Article 194 of the TFEU). Overall, the Lisbon Treaty innovated the process of community integration, providing greater opportunities for the implementation of the new Strategy which will be further renamed in 2010 with the name "Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth"<sup>126</sup>.

It is for this reason that 2010 is celebrated as a turning point. The feverish work of the European institutions in dealing with the emergencies of the crisis resulted in progressively redefining the political and economic governance of the EU. The novelties represented by the introduction of the President of the European Council and the strengthening of the powers of the traditional institutions. The Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council in fact formulated a new institutional framework that showed itself in the decision-making process of the EU government.

The Union responds to the crisis with strengthened and renewed legal bases, but also with the continuity of a strategic vision. In 2010, in fact, the Lisbon Strategy was formally concluded, ten years after it was launched in the Portuguese capital on 24 March 2000. The European Council set the priority objectives for making Europe, by 2010, a knowledge-based, more competitive, cohesive, inclusive, innovative and socially sustainable economy, with an

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<sup>126</sup> European Commission, COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION, *EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, COM (2010) 2020 final, Brussels, 3.3.2010.  
Retrieved at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52010DC2020>

average European employment rate of 70%, a rate of 60% female employment, a ratio of investment in research and development equal to 3% of EU GDP.

With the completion of the ten-year cycle of the Lisbon strategy, the European institutions and the Member States started the debate for the definition of a post-2010 strategy, through a verification of the results and the identification of the limits recorded. The new "Europe 2020" strategy should have strengthened the social dimension, combining the economic recovery strategy, the strategy for growth and employment, Sustainable Development and attention to climate change in an effective and coherent way. Europe 2020 became one of the tools for rehabilitating the European economy, which enhanced the role of public-private partnership as a driver of public investment, which continued to be plagued by historical economic and institutional asymmetries that had further exacerbated the international financial crisis<sup>127</sup>. It is necessary to underline that in this Europe 2020 contest it represented the EU's response to the pressing phenomenon of globalization and the need to face the new dimension of global competitiveness in a context of international financial crisis.

Indeed, the urgency of having to face the financial crisis imposed an acceleration in the coordination process. To some extent, the Lisbon process was still a phase of experimentation of the integration of Community policies, representing a useful lesson to understand the need to make the coordination and surveillance of monetary and economic policy more uniform, strengthening at the same time the role of the European institutions and in particular that of the European Commission.

With Europe 2020, attention is once again focused on targets, for which each Member State will have to contribute to the definition and implementation of objectives, using paths and policies that reflect their condition. In this sense, the Europe 2020 strategy outlines a framework of the social market economy for the next decade, focusing on three priority areas:

- 1) intelligent growth
- 2) sustainable growth
- 3) inclusive growth

Progress in these fields will be assessed on the basis of five main goals pursued by the EU, but that member states will have to translate into national targets, integrating them into their economic and social structures:

- 1) employment up to 75% of people aged 20 to 64;

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<sup>127</sup> *op.cit.*, BARNES P.M., HOERBER T.C., *Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe: The Evolution of the Discourse on Sustainability*, Routledge, 2013.

- 2) 3% of EU GDP must be invested in research and development;
- 3) achievement of the goals of the "2020 climate & energy package" policy;
- 4) the school dropout rate must be less than 10 % and at least 40 % of young people must have a degree or diploma;
- 5) lowering the risk of poverty by 20 million people.

The architecture of the Europe 2020 strategy was based on the good functioning of the European Internal Market, which remained the driving force behind European integration. Thus, a political framework was envisaged in continuity with the first decade of the new millennium, but more ambitious, which took into account the limits and the teaching of the experience lived with the Lisbon Strategy and which allowed to promote not only growth, employment, innovation and competitiveness, but also a more participatory society and “greener” economic development.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### From Millennium Development Goals to SDGs

#### *I. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development: Rio+20, 'The Future We Want'*

The overall balance of almost forty years of community environmental policies presented lights and shadows.

Generally speaking, there have been numerous measures taken by the EU for Sustainable Development, especially in the last decade, among which the start of the establishment of a European network of ecological sites called Natura 2000<sup>128</sup> established under the Habitat Directive<sup>129</sup> (1992) for the loss of natural heritage and biodiversity and again the 2004 Aalborg Commitments, a document proposing in the next ten years, ten commitments to translate the ideas of sustainable urban future into concrete objectives and actions to be implemented at local level, using direct participation of citizens<sup>130</sup>.

However, during the first decade, what seems most to be missed, were the mechanisms of constitutional adjustment and accountability within the individual Member States. The Strategy has highlighted the insufficiency of coordinated development and innovation policies and the close correlation between the need for convergence of the performance of individual Member States and the coordination of their policies for the implementation of Sustainable Development, in a European market increasingly integrated. The first decade has encouraged greater awareness about the general need for integration in those sectors where the resistance of the Member States was still strong. The infringement proceedings brought against the individual Member States by the European Commission before the Court of Justice of the European Communities for failing to fulfil specific environmental obligations under the

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<sup>128</sup> Natura 2000 is the main instrument of the European Union's biodiversity conservation policy. This is an ecological network spread throughout the territory of the Union to ensure the long-term maintenance of natural habitats and threatened or rare species of flora and fauna Community.

<sup>129</sup> EU governments adopted the Habitats Directive in 1992 with the Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

Retrieved at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:01992L0043-20070101>

<sup>130</sup> The Aalborg Commitments were adopted by delegates to the June 2004 Aalborg+10 Conference and have been signed by hundreds of Local Governments.



Community legislation have been numerous. In this sense, with the exclusion from the community method and the majority vote of some sectors of fundamental importance for the member states, the economic and political choices remained entirely within national competence such as land planning, land use, resource management water, energy policy. In this way, the realization of a truly coordinated and flexible common environmental policy that would allow the EU a more comprehensive and coherent global approach than ever before, to foster a new system of economic and social relations compatible with environmental protection and the redistribution of resources would be made more difficult.

Considering these limits of EU environmental policy, the institutional reforms of the EU launched with the Europe 2020 strategy should have led to the assumption of a more defined, clear, univocal identity of the Union itself.

As we have seen, on a global level, the beginning of the 21st century was marked by the new model of Sustainable development, drawn with the definition of the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In a context where the challenge of globalization was becoming an increasingly widespread phenomenon, the 2007 “Beyond GDP” conference<sup>131</sup> made a significant contribution to the cultural advancement of the concept of Sustainable Development, starting to refute the validity of this indicator of the entire social development and progress in general. The year 2008 opened the most serious economic crisis after that of 1929, but the first decade of the new millennium had been marked above all by the hardship of the climate negotiations which had first been relaunched by the United States in Bali in Indonesia (COP 13, 2007) and finally sabotaged from China to Copenhagen (COP 15, 2009). Indeed, during the Cop 13, an action plan was launched to reach a global agreement. Its purpose should include an increase in the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction requirements of rich countries and the inclusion of emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil, which until then had not respected any constraints because they were considered developing countries, with the aim to block the exponential growth of their emissions. According to the forecasts, the new treaty should have been adopted at Cop 15 in Copenhagen in 2009, but the outcome was unsatisfactory because the Conference ended with a mere political agreement without any constraint or concrete objective that had only one worthy passage concerning the containment of the increase in the average global temperature below the 2°C expected. Furthermore, there was a great deal of uncertainty about the actions that should have taken place after the Kyoto

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<sup>131</sup> In November 2007, the European Commission, together with the European Parliament, the Club of Rome, the WWF and the OECD hosted a conference called “Beyond GDP”. Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cros/content/38-beyond-gdp\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cros/content/38-beyond-gdp_en)

Protocol, whose deadline was scheduled for 2012. The development model based on unlimited economic growth, on the increase in consumption and on the over-exploitation of natural resources, continued to generate a complex ecological, economic, social and ethical crisis from which humanity had to exit to avoid the escalation of the major global problems already under way such as poverty, hunger, desertification, wars, land disruption, water scarcity, reduction of natural resources and environmental exodus.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in June 2012, known as the Rio+20<sup>132</sup>, stood at the height of these events, while Sustainable Development seemed to be losing its historic drive for the environment and development. Twenty years after the first meeting (Rio '92), the third Summit on environment and Sustainable Development was held again in Rio de Janeiro and saw the participation of 191 countries represented by 12 thousand delegates and 79 heads of state and government. At the base of this new meeting there would have been the will to analyze honestly and consistently the feedback of the last two decades, identifying strengths and weaknesses achieved in the path towards Sustainable Development and renewing the political commitment.

Between the preparatory negotiation phase (from 13 to 19 June) and the ministerial-political phase (from 20 to 22 June) the Conference was characterized in the early days by intense work to try to resolve a series of disputes dragged for the two years of preparation at the Conference. Nonetheless, the production of a very substantial basic text (over 200 pages) but not very consensual, had led, almost a week after the beginning of the work, only partially (about a third of the basic text) an almost unanimous consensus and the Conference he was about to fail even before he began his final political-ministerial session. For this reason, in order to quickly recover the maximum consensus, a Brazilian compromise text produced a new document on June 18 in which all the points of contrast were eliminated (about three quarters of the basic text) making the final text much shorter and exemplified (less than 50 pages). This "compromise text" was probably the main political decision of the Conference, given its centrality in helping to define the program that in 2015 will give continuity in a shared form to the MDGs. The new text reaffirms the principles and renews the commitments already made in the past, on which consensus was granted, but does not define for the future neither objectives, strategies, nor any concrete commitment to be achieved. For the future, it limits itself to giving good advice, postponing the definition of any new objectives, commitments,

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<sup>132</sup> United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20, 2012.

Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20>

actions and controversial points that have been cancelled in the decisions of the United Nations General Assembly. The approval of the shared final document of Rio+20 entitled "The future We Want", concluded the Conference on 22 June 2012. Substantially, this document recognized the existing problems, especially environmental ones, highlighting the need to resolve them and renewing the commitments and actions taken by the Rio 1992 Summit. The innovations are found in the two sections that concerned the two main themes as central challenges: Green Economy and a global governance system for Sustainable Development, understood as economic, social and environmental, aimed at strengthening institutional framework conditions. The Green Economy was for the first time included in the global agenda. The final document explicitly recognizes that Green Economy can contribute to sustainable development and to the fight against poverty.

Beyond the expected controversy, to unite the judgments of the delegations and the convictions of civil society, admitted for the first time, was the realization that governments individually were not able to pursue Sustainable Development. In fact, the document acknowledged a strengthened negotiating role for a broad global sustainability movement including an agreement to start an intergovernmental process within the UN General Assembly to propose options on effective strategies for financing Sustainable Development, and to request UN agencies to identify a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean technologies while respecting the environment.

Although it was clear that Green Economy was now a compulsory and shared path, no explications were given, simply limiting the role of Green Economy to the fundamental principle of Sustainable Development. This principle had to be consistent with the strategies and commitments already taken and had to be consistent with international laws, respecting, in particular, the principle of national sovereignty. In this vague context, each country was free to choose which approach to adopt for Green Economy and which strategy to implement<sup>133</sup>.

As for the institutional framework, good advice was in practice dispensed. The institutional reference for Sustainable Development had to integrate the three aspects of sustainability: economic, social and environmental, integrating international cooperation between countries on the same sustainability objectives and taking into account the existing institutional framework included in the UN structure. The Rio+20 summit was characterized by an absolute lack of political leadership, which produced a document that contained no

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<sup>133</sup> ANDONOVA L.B., HOFFMANN M.J., *From Rio to Rio and Beyond Innovation in Global Environmental Governance*, The Journal of Environment & Development 21, no.1 (2012), pp.57-61.

concrete commitment, explicitly clarifying that it was not intended to define objectives or actions for Sustainable Development but delayed the chosen for a subsequent negotiation process that will see the United Nations General Assembly as the key player. There has been no concrete about financial aid to poor countries to support their transition to a fair and Green Economy. The only positive note was the strong vitality of civil society and the dynamism of part of the companies present. The company has moved, especially in the side activities in Rio+20, to define more realistic initiatives for the future. Several bilateral collaborations were started between countries or groups of countries, joint projects in the industrial and private productive sector, new business activities for the development of Green Economy, new research activities and technological innovation for the efficient use of resources and the fight against poverty. Furthermore, the attention was focused on a series of topics concerning mainly the reforestation and sustainable management of forests, sustainable agriculture, the development of female entrepreneurship in Africa, the recycling of waste, the formation and development of so-called "Green jobs". It was also worth mentioning the World Congress on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability, which took place in Brazil on 17 and 20 June 2012<sup>134</sup>, where the problems of international environmental law and the protection of natural resources were addressed, but also those of human rights that in many countries of the world had not yet been implemented and not least the problems of corruption that hindered the start of Green Economy. For the rest, the game was played on the one hand by a Europe unable to exercise real power, on the other, by emerging countries with a fluctuating economic attitude. The US, on the other hand, was not interested in making a concrete change for sustainability, given the heavy weight of the oil lobbies so that the situation would remain unchanged. The big multinationals continued to grow and advance, restricting the democratic spaces and destroying the ecosystems to enrich themselves and save the economic-financial system.

The European Union was actively working in the negotiation process for the purpose of Rio+20, with the aim of obtaining important and tangible results from the Conference. In March 2010 the European Commission adopted the aforementioned Europe 2020 strategy for sustainable, smart and inclusive growth, endorsed by Heads of State and Government in the following June, for which part of the objectives included moving towards a sustainable economy, efficient in terms of resources and low carbon emissions. In June 2011, the

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<sup>134</sup> World Congress on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability, 2012. Retrieved at <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/un-and-the-rule-of-law/united-nations-environment-programme/>

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions was also announced, “Rio+20: towards the green economy and better governance<sup>135</sup>”, which proposed specific actions to be implemented at international, national and regional levels. The European Union was developing a common position in view of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20, stating that the main operating results of Rio+20 should have included a roadmap for Green Economy, with actions and goals. specific international measures, as well as a package of reforms to strengthen international environmental governance. The EU reiterated its strong support for an ambitious outcome of the Conference and politically significant while at national level, the commitments to be respected should have varied according to the context and in relation to the degree of development of each individual country. In fact, the EU proposed the adoption of an action framework called the "Green Economy Roadmap" which set out certain paths of implementation with indication of times and objectives in the areas related to the transition to the green economy to be pursued internationally. Furthermore, the EU considered it essential to give greater prominence to Sustainable Development in the context of UN governance and to initiate a structural reform of existing instruments, starting the process of transforming UNEP into the UN specialized agency, strengthening its mandate and financial endowments to enable it to operate at a level of legal and technical capacity, which was appropriate and similar to the other specialized agencies of the United Nations. However, the final Rio+20 document decreed the failure of the European Green Economy Roadmap and UNEP did not obtain the status of Agency for Sustainable Development, as a result of the combined vetoes of China and the United States. UNEP will only be the strengthened reference for the protection of the environment and for the coordination of multilateral environmental agreements and will have universal representation<sup>136</sup>.

Despite the rejection of the Green Economy Roadmap, the European Commission, in line with the prospect of pursuing the green economy transaction, proposes in November 2012, the seventh Environmental Action Program (2013-2020), which will guide the EU’s political

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<sup>135</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Brussels, 20.6.2011 COM (2011) 363 final.

Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52011DC0363>

<sup>136</sup> *op.cit.*, BARNES P.M., HOERBER T.C., *Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe: The Evolution of the Discourse on Sustainability*, Routledge, 2013.

action on environment and climate until 2020. A few months after the conclusion of Rio+20, the EU identified, through the seventh Environmental Action Program, three key objectives:

- 1) to protect, conserve and enhance the Union's natural capital
- 2) to turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy
- 3) to safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing

and nine priority objectives such as:

- 1) to protect, conserve and enhance the Union's natural capital
- 2) to turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy
- 3) to safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing
- 4) to maximise the benefits of the Union's environment legislation by improving implementation
- 5) to increase knowledge about the environment and widen the evidence base for policy
- 6) to secure investment for environment and climate policy and account for the environmental costs of any societal activities
- 7) to better integrate environmental concerns into other policy areas and ensure coherence when creating new policy
- 8) to make the Union's cities more sustainable
- 9) to help the Union address international environmental and climate challenges more effectively

Through better implementation of EU environmental legislation and ensuring the necessary investments in support of environmental policy, the program also aimed at strengthening efforts to help European cities become more sustainable and improve the EU's ability to respond to challenges regional and global environmental and climate.

## II. *‘Transforming our World’: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs*

Overall, the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro had effectively triggered the mainstreaming of Sustainable Development in world politics. After all, the change in policies and cultures had progressed with difficulty and with contradictory results, as the results of the fight against climate change highlighted - global emissions at +30% compared to 1990, instead of reduced - which were becoming an expression increasingly common, but concretely we continued to postpone the adoption and compliance with concrete measures to combat this phenomenon<sup>137</sup>. During the 2011 COP17, in effect, an attempt was made again to set a new deadline for the adoption of a global CO2 reduction agreement that was supposed to replace and improve the Kyoto Protocol - which had been extended until 2020 during the COP18 in Doha in 2012, except out of respect for a few irreproachable governments, among which the EU, which were seriously committed to meeting the emission reduction - only to postpone the commitment to 2015. The most important fact was certainly the creation of the Green Climate Fund (GCF)<sup>138</sup>, which aimed to economically support developing countries to adapt to climate change through medium-term projects and national plans. The fund should have secured \$ 100 billion a year until 2020 and to this end, the EU continues to be one of the fund's biggest financiers. A further step forward made by Europe towards Sustainable Development being carried out in March 2013 with the Communication of the European Commission "A decent life for all - Ending poverty and giving the world to sustainable future<sup>139</sup>", with which Europe relaunched the inclusive Green economy as its main path to Sustainable Development, confirming the inspiration that had guided it to Rio+20.

The concept of Sustainable Development of the European Commission had recognized as a prerequisite for progress and for growth itself was an inclusive green economy, through

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<sup>137</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/>

<sup>138</sup> GCF was formally established during the 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancun as a financial mechanism under the UNFCCC created to support the efforts of developing countries to respond to the challenge of climate change. GCF helps developing countries limit or reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapt to climate change. It seeks to promote a paradigm shift to low-emission and climate-resilient development, taking into account the needs of nations that are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/funds-and-financial-entities/green-climate-fund>

<sup>139</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A DECENT LIFE FOR ALL: Ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future, COM (2013) 92 final, Brussels, 27.2.2013.

Retrieved at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/decent-life-allending-poverty-and-giving-world-sustainable-future\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/decent-life-allending-poverty-and-giving-world-sustainable-future_en)

sustainable consumption and production that pursued resource efficiency and low energy consumption. The green economy would have allowed a structural transformation at all stages of development, to guide the market, improving production capacity, development and private sector investments to ensure that the benefits were widely shared. In this context, the EU declared through the Communication of the European Commission “Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015<sup>140</sup>”, to renew once again the commitment to the implementation of a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, which would be the main point of reference for the new European development policies<sup>141</sup>.

However, although the EU continued vigorously to pursue the Millennium Goals, the financial and economic crisis that began in 2008 had led to a sharp revision of priorities. Starting in summer 2014, the primary objective of the new European Commission was to ensure the financial sustainability of European economies, even at the cost of strict austerity policies, to restart economic growth and boost employment. The economic and social system, despite some progress, was still far from being considered sustainable. The global context had not been able to offer a significant political response to a Sustainable Development and the effects of this political indecision were exacerbated by the economic crisis, born of the reckless acceleration towards economic growth increasingly dependent on finance. In a context of substantial uncertainty, it was difficult to indicate a shared horizon of change, capable of stimulating a request for participation by individual states beyond the national sphere. In the 2015 Assessment Report<sup>142</sup> of the MDGs, important progress was noted, in particular in halving extreme poverty according to objectives and partly in access to education and health, however, at a global level, it was still very far from the objectives of the Millennium in most cases and severely due to climate and environmental degradation. Near the imminent expiration of the MDGs, set for 2015, for many countries, the set objectives remained far away and there remained strong discrepancies between developed and developing countries. Against this background, in September 2013, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) replaced

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<sup>140</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015, COM (2015) 44 final, EUROPEAN COMMISSION Brussels, 5.2.2015.

Retrieved at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/communication-global-partnership-poverty-eradication-and-sustainable-development-after-2015\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/communication-global-partnership-poverty-eradication-and-sustainable-development-after-2015_en)

<sup>141</sup> ZUPI M., *L'agenda di sviluppo post 2015*, (ed.) CeSPI (Centro studi di politica internazionale), Osservatorio di politica internazionale, Approfondimenti n. 79, 2013. Retrieved at [www.parlamento.it/osservatoriointernazionale](http://www.parlamento.it/osservatoriointernazionale)

<sup>142</sup> Global assessment report on disaster risk reduction 2015.

Retrieved at <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/42809>



the now obsolete Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) set up during the Rio Summit in 1992, with a new Government Forum invested with high responsibilities, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)<sup>143</sup>, composed of representatives appointed by the General Assembly. The HLPF Forum will hold annual meetings and every four years will be convened in the General Assembly, which will provide political guidelines that will identify emerging progress and challenges and mobilize further actions to accelerate the implementation phases of Sustainable Development. The tight negotiations to follow up the Rio + 20 commitments occupied the subscribing countries throughout the 2013-2015 period within an Open Working Group, set up *ad-hoc* to hold a series of eight week-long negotiating sessions to prepare for the Summit of the United Nations in 2015. The Addis Ababa Conference of July 2015 represented a first important event of Sustainable Development. In Addis Ababa, world leaders have sought ways to cope financially with the ambitious and costly goals of Sustainable Development (SDGs), which will be implemented through the 2030 Agenda a few months later in the New York Conference. The Addis Ababa Conference for financing for development (FFD), produced a document of agreement that contained the criteria for financially supporting the 2030 Agenda. It provides a new global framework for financing sustainable development by aligning all financing flows and policies with economic, social and environmental priorities<sup>144</sup>.

On September 25, 2015, the 70th session of the General Assembly was able to host the United National Sustainable Development Summit in New York and an informal parallel meeting on climate dialogue<sup>145</sup>. The Summit will lead to unanimous vote by the governments of the 193 UN member states on the final document, which will not undergo any changes. For the first time, ministers of labour and the economy also participated as well as ministers for the environment. The final text, adopted with Resolution 70/1 and the result of an interminable negotiation, is the result of a fragmented path, in which it was difficult to perceive a strong leadership. This document, entitled "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development"<sup>146</sup>, - which already in its preamble expressed clear and unequivocal universal

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<sup>143</sup> The establishment of the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was mandated in 2012 by the outcome document of the Sustainable Development (Rio+20), "The Future We Want". The format and organizational aspects of the Forum are outlined in General Assembly resolution 67/290.

Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

<sup>144</sup> The Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July 2015. Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/534\\_pt](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/534_pt)

<sup>145</sup> The United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda was held from 25 to 27 September 2015, in New York and convened as a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly. Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/summit>

<sup>146</sup> On 25 September, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Resolution 70/1, "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=111&nr=8496&menu=35>

values, the vision and the spirit of collaboration and determination necessary for a global challenge of such magnitude - reiterated all the principles of the Rio Declaration and was ambitious beyond its actual potential and contained the 17 new objectives of Sustainable Development renamed SDGs accompanied by 169 targets that partially quantify the objectives - which would have replaced and integrated the 8 MDGs born during the Millennium summit and close to expiry. The SDGs would have guided world political decisions for the next fifteen years, or until 2030, and proposed:

- 1) No Poverty
- 2) Zero Hunger
- 3) Good Health and Well-Being
- 4) Quality Education
- 5) Gender Equality
- 6) Clean Water and Sanitation
- 7) Affordable and Clean Energy
- 8) Decent Work and Economic Growth
- 9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- 10) Reduced Inequalities
- 11) Sustainable Cities and Communities
- 12) Responsible Consumption and Production
- 13) Climate Action
- 14) Life Below Water
- 15) Life on Land
- 16) Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- 17) Partnerships for the Goals

The new SDGs should have come into force the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 and would have a universal value. These objectives indicated the need for intervention in each country to evaluate the evolution of Sustainable Development.

*“It is an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people. [...] The future of humanity and our planet lies in our hands<sup>147</sup>”*

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<sup>147</sup> UN 2015, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, p. 14.  
Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

The signatory countries should have provided their contribution on the basis of their respective capacities and the state of implementation of the objectives was monitored by the United Nations through the HLPF which used about 240 statistical indicators related to the objectives and targets, approved by the UN but also at the regional level, through the UN Regional Economic Commissions.

The 2030 Agenda thus sanctioned the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs. A conceptual difference can be recognized by the fact that the MDGs were aimed at poor countries to which rich countries would have to provide technical and financial assistance, while the SDGs, proposed goals and challenges for all world governments in an indistinct way. Therefore, the focus was shifting from the help of the industrialized countries towards the poor countries to a conception of a global vision of the pursuit of intergenerational wellbeing extended in the temporal sense<sup>148</sup>. The 2030 Agenda thus appeared to be much more concise and operational and was defined as an action plan for people, the planet and prosperity and also aimed at strengthening universal peace and freedom. To eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, especially extreme poverty, was the greatest global challenge, as well as a stringent dictate for sustainability. The fight against climate change was left to the competence of the UNFCCC Climate Convention, but at the same time it was the first of the environmental objectives of the 2030 Agenda. The three innovative features of the 2030 Agenda could be found in its universality, in the need for everyone's participation in change, its integrated vision of the problems and actions to be implemented to achieve Sustainable Development. In this sense, the 2030 Agenda could not be declassified as the umpteenth declaration of good intentions as had happened in the past Conferences. The need to involve all countries derived from the role that each country had in determining the change in economic, social and environmental dynamics in a globalized world in which social, financial and environmental instabilities could affect another country and influence the functioning of the whole terrestrial ecosystem.

However, the new structure of the SDGs presented significant criticalities. The major criticism, always moved, at the end of the previous summits, had always been that of not being able to set concrete and quantified objectives for sustainable development and above all the fact of having to rely on the will of initiative by the individual states.

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<sup>148</sup> SACHS J.D., *L'era dello sviluppo sostenibile*, ed.it. Milano, Università Bocconi Editore, 2015.

The SDG framework was devoid of operational priorities and sometimes contradictory and inconsistent due to the complex interactions between different purposes, such as the strong growth of developing countries and the reduction of emissions. The special section of the UN Statistical Commission, the Inter-Agency Expert Group (IAEG-SDG), also established during the Summit, was tasked with developing and implementing the Global Indicator for the Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda<sup>149</sup>, which should have subsidized the indicators of regional and local authorities which, given the backwardness or even the inexistence of the statistical authorities of many countries, would have had a very difficult task to carry out. In the UN vision, the 17 SDGs are not hierarchically ordered because the idea was to reach them simultaneously and contextually. In this sense, the non-hierarchization of the SDGs leads to obvious contradictions. For instance, Goal 8, - which proposed to support per capita economic growth in accordance with national conditions with an annual growth of at least 7% of gross domestic product in developing countries - was found to be incompatible with Goal 13 proposing to take urgent measures to combat climate change, as the need to increase GDP would inevitably lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions due to an acceleration in energy consumption. In the case of China, in fact - which continues to be politically considered as a developing country despite having economic growth rates close to 7% - if the strong economic growth aimed at least 7% per year up to 2030, as indicated by the SDGs, it is realistically unlikely to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases due to the enormous world weight of the Chinese emissions and the limited carbon budget that can still be emitted into the atmosphere to have the possibility to remain below the average increase of 2°C. Moreover, the disproportion of the ambition of the preamble of the Agenda with the vagueness of some objectives seemed evident; the natural limits of the earth had not been mentioned and there was no clear language on the decarbonisation of production, transport and consumption; human rights were mentioned in the preamble and in the declaration, but they were not very evident as guiding elements of the objectives and targets; no timetable had been set for achieving gender equality<sup>150</sup>.

The European Union had participated in a very active and proactive way in the whole negotiation process that led to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The vice president of the European Commission, Timmermans,

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<sup>149</sup> The global indicator framework was developed by the IAEG-SDGs and agreed upon, including refinements on 232 indicators, at the 48th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission held in March 2017.

Retrieved at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/>

<sup>150</sup> BROWNE S., *Sustainable Development Goals and UN Goal-Setting*, Taylor & Francis, 2017.

responsible for Sustainable Development and head of the EU delegation in New York, together with the Commissioner for Development Cooperation Neven Mimica and the High Representative for Foreign Policy Federica Mogherini, declared that the EU it would be committed again to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which would have been an essential component in countering the causes of the migration crisis that Europe was facing. Furthermore, the EU reaffirmed the commitment of member states to allocate 0.7% of GDP to Official Development Assistance (ODA), in addition to emphasizing the role of the private sector as a driver for development and the importance of channeling investments towards key development sectors in order to achieve the objectives of the new post-2015 Agenda.

### *III. The Paris Agreement on climate change*

The UN depicted 2015 as watershed year that marked a turning point in the change in the paradigm of development and for which “*no one will be left behind*” and to “*endeavour to reach the furthest behind first*”<sup>151</sup>. However, the true legacy of 2015 would have been clear only after the response of the Paris Conference on the global climate agreement. To a certain extent, the 2030 Agenda, represented the last chance to bring the world on a sustainable path; if there had been a new failure after the attempt made in Copenhagen in 2009, the possibility of seeking a global multilateral political agreement in the fight against climate change would have finally waned.

Given the urgent need for a change in the development paradigm to cope with the alarming phenomenon of climate change, the success achieved with the final document of the New York Conference would have been such since the change in perspective would have sealed a global agreement on the climate at the twenty-first UN Climate Change Conference of Paris scheduled as the third major international event of 2015 organized by the United Nations for Sustainable Development, after the Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa (July 2015) and the Summit on Sustainable Development in New York (September 2015).

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<sup>151</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.  
Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

For this reason, at the Paris Conference on Climate Change, absolute importance was given to the fact

*"That climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet and thus requires the widest possible cooperation by all countries"<sup>152</sup>.*

Such statement was the fundamental assumption reported in the text approved at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) held in Paris from 30 November to 12 December 2015. The 21st-year session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21)<sup>153</sup>, represented a crucial appointment for the achievement of the objectives pursued in the last twenty-two years. After twelve days of negotiations, the member states of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reached an agreement. The result of the Conference was sealed in the final text which consisted of 32 pages and divided into two parts: a 20-page preamble and the text of the "Paris Agreement"<sup>154</sup> which contained 29 articles.

The Paris agreements provided for the objective of limiting the increase in the Earth's temperature well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels, with a commitment to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. Countries committed to carry out checks every five years and to deliver over one hundred billion a year in clean energy funds and to initiate a reimbursement mechanism to compensate for the financial losses due to climate change in those countries considered most vulnerable and all those areas that were most affected by the effects of global warming. Inevitably, the essential commitment for the successful outcome of the agreements was that of the United States, considering that they were responsible for more than 35% of the gas emissions. In this sense, the outgoing US President, Barack Obama, showed his positive will in ratifying the agreements, stating that these agreements were not revocable - contrary to his predecessor George Bush, who recorded a great step back in the commitment of participation, promotion and possible ratification of agreements on energy, the environment, climate and Sustainable Development. The agreements, aimed at limiting - and not reducing, as in the past - emissions, needed the ratification of at least 55 countries representing 55% of

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<sup>152</sup> Preamble of Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 12 December 2015.

<sup>153</sup> COP 21, Paris, 2015. Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

<sup>154</sup> Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 12 December 2015. The Agreement enters into force on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2016, the thirtieth day after the date on which at least 55 Parties to the Convention accounting in total for at least an estimated 55 per cent of the total global greenhouse gas emissions have deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.

the emissions of polluting gases into the atmosphere. They came into force on 4 November 2016, thanks to the global consensus of India and China, as well as the United States. Indeed, the Paris climate conference gave rise to a historic global political agreement to combat climate change. Almost all of the international community seemed to have also agreed on a point of view of international environmental law that had always been lacking due to the powerlessness of the international community itself.

The fight against climate change was the aim which was hoped to concretely target the actions of the 197 countries that had joined the Agreement, which distinguished the action of the developed countries from that of the developing countries. Developed countries had the absolute objective of reducing emissions related to all sectors of the economy and also play an important role of cooperation towards developing countries, to which they will allocate financial resources to allow their action to be adapted to the objectives prefixed by the agreement, making their projects and actions more ambitious. The agreement provided that each country, through the instrument of the INDC<sup>155</sup>, would have to define its national emission reduction contribution and update it every 5 years. Commitments to reduce emissions were set at national level and therefore with a greater probability and a better involvement to respect them. In this regard, the preamble also emphasized the efforts made by civil society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities and other sub-national authorities which were increasingly involved in the fight against climate change.

The Paris Agreement was therefore an imperative condition for continuing to act on climate change, and its scope had a considerable media impact all over the world.

Nevertheless, the Paris Agreement in 2015 found numerous criticisms from the scientific community. First of all, the Agreement appeared merely political in so far as it was disconnected from the real state of gravity of the problem at world level. In fact, the agreement contained multiple areas of ambiguity. The first obvious ambiguity was noted in the name itself; an agreement, as such, did not provide for a legally binding value - so much so that it was possible to exit the Paris Agreements - as was the case with a Protocol (e.g. Kyoto Protocol), and furthermore no sanction was provided for the failure compliance with the commitments. Many scientists have wished that the respect of the commitments made had legal significance in international organizations, but the governments of emerging countries, such as

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<sup>155</sup> Prior to the start of COP21, each government had been asked to file a document containing the so-called INDCs. Contrary to what happened for the Kyoto Protocol, in fact, the countries presented the “Intended Nationally Determined Contributions” (INDC), which represented the official promises of emission reduction of each nation that undertook to sign the Paris Agreement.

India and China, have obtained that the control and monitoring of progress were controlled by the principle of self-certification. China, for example, claimed its status as a developing country but at the same time was one of the largest producers of greenhouse gases.

A second ambiguity concerns the method for determining the commitments made, which was commissioned to the individual countries. Governments should have established how and when to implement the GHGs targets - given the long-term nature of targets, for which a deadline had not been specified – but in this way, every government could act autonomously without urgency, thus maintaining ample room for freedom of action.

Previously at the beginning of the Paris Conference, the UNFCCC, had published the results of the analysis of the received INDCs that showed how the trend of the growth of the emissions was largely higher than the maximum limit required to contain the increase of the Earth's temperature to 1,5°C.

In the same way, the decision to set the first global evaluation on emission reductions in 2023 was a contradiction given the long run and the risk that the long-time frame for expiration could have increased pollution. In such a way, the terms of the agreement would have been unattainable. Likewise, the Agreements have not been able to impose themselves on the interests and pressures of the oil-producing lobbies, which did not allow a date to be specified for the definitive decarbonisation of the industry to the advantage of alternative sources. As a consequence, it was not possible to establish any objective on the complete substitution of the energies connected to the carbon-fossil with alternative sources.

Therefore, in the presence of multiple and conflicting interests, the praiseworthy commitments under the agreement remained, once again, only good intentions for the future<sup>156</sup>.

In November 2016, Donald Trump's victory in the presidential elections led the United States to implement a change of course in environmental policy; the newly elected president expressed his willingness to dismantle the “Clean Power Plan<sup>157</sup>” - strongly desired by former US president Obama and it was a plan to affect the US national energy strategy by reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases from the electricity production sector - promoting oil drilling, increased coal production and greater freedom for industries about the mechanisms to be adopted with respect for the environment. The obstinacy expressed by the new President of the United States in forcing a backtrack on the agreements already reached, was a clear sign to avoid the collective, environmental and prospective objectives of Sustainable Development

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<sup>156</sup> KLEIN D., CARAZO M.P., DOELLE M., BULMER J., HIGHAM A., *The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Analysis and Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>157</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.edf.org/clean-power-plan-resources>



achieved through years of international community efforts. However, again in November 2016, world governments had gathered in Marrakech, Morocco for COP22 of the UNCCC<sup>158</sup>. This umpteenth meeting has consecrated the first results achieved over the years, despite criticism and difficulties, from the project of reducing emissions and limiting the phenomenon of climate change. The whole process had undoubtedly proved to be a conquest in the long journey towards Sustainable Development. The same UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon had specified, during COP22, that the process started was unstoppable, beyond the convictions of the individual heads of state. COP22 was aimed at tackling the difficulties in the implementation of the negotiations brought about by the Paris agreement. The primary objective of COP22 has involved the proactive involvement of industrial and non-governmental organizations, in order to reduce lobbying interference and to channel it towards environmental protection and conservation. The Marrakech Conference represented a fundamental aspect of a revised circular economy, placing the dignity of the human being at the center of the development process. Among the decisions that were approved at the end of COP 22, an important step forward was made through the obligation of participating countries to revise the INDCs on their CO2 emissions by 2018 and not by 2020, as envisaged initially with the Paris Agreements<sup>159</sup>. At the European level, the scenario in 2016 was marked by Brexit popular referendum in the United Kingdom which, on 23 June 2016, voted in favor of leaving the European Union, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Cameron. The notification for the activation of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty will be notified to the British Parliament on March 29, 2017 by Prime Minister Theresa May.

However, between August and September 2016, reflection on the role of Europe in economic planning and development focused on Sustainable Development. On 22 November 2016, the EU Commission published three Communications to define a new strategic approach to Sustainable Development. The first, entitled “Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability<sup>160</sup>”, aimed at integrating the SDGs into the ten European Commission’s priorities<sup>161</sup> and in the European strategic framework, Europe 2020. In

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<sup>158</sup> COP22, The Marrakech Conference of the Parties on climate change, 2016.

Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/process/conferences/pastconferences/marrakech-climate-change-conference-november-2016/events-and-programme/side-events-and-exhibits>

<sup>159</sup> POPOVSKI V., *The Implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change*, Routledge, 2018.

<sup>160</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability, {SWD (2016) 390 final}, COM (2016) 739 final, Strasbourg, 22.11.2016.

Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2016%3A739%3AFIN>

<sup>161</sup> The Juncker Commission's ten priorities. Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/index_en)

particular, some key actions were identified, including the preparation of an annual report on the progress of the Union in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the continuation of the interlocution and collaboration with foreign partners, through the use of all available resources for external policies, with a particular effort for developing countries. Furthermore, a stakeholder platform was planned to allow for the development and exchange of best practices in civil society, at member state level and at Union level, and finally the establishment of a strategy to integrate and subsequently overcome Europe 2020 and relaunch it until 2030. The Commission also recalled that the path to achieving the SDGs in the European context also depended on the division of competences between the Union and the member states and consequently on the role of individual countries not only internally, but also at Community level. The second Communication, entitled “Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development - Our World, our Dignity, our Future<sup>162</sup>”, proposed a shared vision and framework for development cooperation, aligning the EU's development policy with the 2030 Agenda. The proposal reflects a paradigm shift in development cooperation in the light of the 2030 Agenda and pays particular attention to key development factors such as gender equality, the younger generation, sustainable energy, climate change and migration. The new Consensus should have an impact on all development activities of the EU and its objective is to increase the credibility, effectiveness and impact of EU development policies on the basis of a common strategy and a shared analysis. The third instead, was joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council entitled “A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific<sup>163</sup>”, defined the next steps for a renewed partnership with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (Acp) countries for the construction of sustainable societies beyond the borders of the EU.

The EU response to the 2030 Agenda will be divided into two strands of activity; the first consisted of integrating the Sustainable Development objectives into the European strategic framework and the current priorities of the Commission; the second aimed at promoting reflection on how to develop the longer-term vision and on the priorities of sectoral policies that will form the basis for the post-2020 period. The Communications of the European

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<sup>162</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development - Our World, our Dignity, our Future, COM (2016) 740 final, Strasbourg, 22.11.2016.

Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2016:740:FIN>

<sup>163</sup> JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL, A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, JOIN(2016) 52 final, Strasbourg, 22.11.2016.

Commission and the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament (ENVI), had stimulated an important debate on the 2030 Agenda among the European institutions, leading to a resolution of the General Affairs Council, bringing together the ministers of the 28 for European policies, which invited the Commission to better specify the strategies for the implementation of the 17 SDGs, indicating timing, concrete objectives and monitoring tools, in particular, the multiannual financial framework after 2020 should be focused on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda<sup>164</sup>. The resolution also called on the Commission to fill the gaps in governance and legislation, and to make a greater effort to ensure the horizontal coherence of policies and to encourage action for the participation of European citizens in issues related to Sustainable development. Among the limits of the European action for sustainability, the lack of a vision that went beyond just the environmental question and the absence of an explicit reference to the role of companies in achieving the SDGs was evident. On 5 October 2016, the EU officially ratified the Paris agreement, the European Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their commitment to implement rapidly and in its entirety the Paris Agreement on climate change, including the objectives set out on climate finance and to lead the global transition to clean energy. The EU member states also emphasized the enhanced EU cooperation with international partners and demonstrating their solidarity with future generations and responsibility towards the whole planet.

2017 began with the celebrations in Rome of the leaders of the 27 member states - and not 28, following the effect of Brexit - of the 60 years of the Union and the signing of the Rome Declaration on March 2017, setting out the 4 objectives for the next ten years of EU life<sup>165</sup>. About a month later, in April, twenty MEPs headed by Roger Helmer of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), signed an appeal addressed to Donald Trump with the request to trash the Paris agreement, hoping that Europe will take a step backwards.

In March 2017, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the international conference "Europe Ambition 2030" renewed the commitment to bring the 2030 Agenda to the centre of European policies. At the initiative of the ASviS<sup>166</sup> and other international organizations, the Europe Ambition 2030 coalition was born, which brought

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<sup>164</sup> General Affairs Council, 13/12/2016.

Retrieved at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2016/12/13/>

<sup>165</sup> Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/eu-celebrates-60-years-rome-treaties-and-looks-future-2017-mar-24\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/eu-celebrates-60-years-rome-treaties-and-looks-future-2017-mar-24_en)

<sup>166</sup> Alleanza Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile (ASviS) was born on 3 February 2016, on the initiative of the Unipolis Foundation and the University of Rome "Tor Vergata", to increase awareness of the importance of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and to mobilize them in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in Italian society, in economic subjects and in institutions.

Retrieved at <http://asvis.it/>

together European civil society organizations to show that the commitment to the 2030 Agenda did not come only from the institutions but also from civil society. With this conference, it was expressed the will to build, around the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Union of the future. The conference focused on rethinking EU governance and policies to make Europe a world leader in SDGs. The organizations of Europe Ambition 2030 then drafted "Scenario 6: A sustainable Europe for its citizens". Scenario 6, in its final version signed by 250 civil society organizations, exceeded the "five scenarios"<sup>167</sup> - proposed by the European Commission on what could be the state of the Union until 2025 - presenting the vision of a Europe that places sustainability at the heart of European projects. Scenario 6, launched on 20 June 2017 and presented to the European Commission, focused on governance and other innovations that could have reconfigured the EU structure in the run-up to the European elections. The aim was to better serve and protect citizens, strengthen non-state actors, work to find a new development system, ensure a new capacity for resilience of the European territory, encouraging new forms of collaboration between the EU and its neighbouring states. The current President of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, welcomed Scenario 6 and stressed the EU's commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

On 26 and 27 June 2017 the 7th Cohesion Forum was held in Brussels<sup>168</sup>, promoted by the European Commission to redefine the management of cohesion funds, one of the most concrete and important aspects for a European Sustainable Development policy. The 7th edition established as a priority the need to simplify the bureaucracy, making the whole management system more accessible and transparent for European citizens, and promoting an approach based on concrete aid in the Regions to respond to global issues.

In view of the UN COP23 on climate change in Bonn<sup>169</sup>, the EU aimed to advance the implementation of the Paris agreement. The conclusions of the Council of the European Union stressed the importance of carrying out the right tools to implement climate policies outlined in the "2030 framework for energy and climate policies for the EU"<sup>170</sup>, adopted by the European Council in October 2014. In this context, the main objective remained to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels<sup>171</sup>. During

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<sup>167</sup> These five scenarios offer a glimpse into the potential future state of the Union, depending on the choices Europe will make.

Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/future-europe/white-paper-future-europe/white-paper-future-europe-five-scenarios\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/future-europe/white-paper-future-europe/white-paper-future-europe-five-scenarios_en)

<sup>168</sup> 7th Cohesion Forum. Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/conferences/7th-cohesion-forum](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/conferences/7th-cohesion-forum)

<sup>169</sup> The 2017 UN Climate Conference COP23 took place in Bonn, Germany, from 6-18 November. Retrieved at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cop23/>

<sup>170</sup> Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030_en)

<sup>171</sup> Council conclusions on the Paris Agreement and preparations for the UNFCCC meetings.

COP23, held under the presidency of the Fiji Islands in the South Pacific, an attempt was made to continue with the concrete implementation and improvement of the promises to reduce emissions on the Paris work program. The EU also agreed on the development of the so-called “Talanoa Dialogue<sup>172</sup>”, which included an evaluation of the collective progress made towards the achievement of the long-term climate objectives at the next COP 24.

2018 began with the adoption by the EU of a first strategy on plastics, “The European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy<sup>173</sup>”, which aims to protect the environment from plastic pollution and at the same time promote growth and innovation, contributing concretely to the achievement of the 2030 SDGs and the objectives of the Paris climate change Agreement. The goal is to make all plastic packaging on the EU market recyclable by 2030, to reduce the use of disposable plastic and to limit the intentional use of microplastics.

At international level, last year was characterized by long shadows of a political confrontation between the European Union and China on one side, and the United States on the other. US President Trump was the only country that asked to exit the agreements signed at the time by former President Barack Obama. Already in 2017, the US President had aired the hypothesis of the exit from the agreements, only to have a rethinking at the beginning of 2018 and for this reason, China was wary of the United States to take the same attitude as with the Kyoto Protocol, never ratified by the Americans.

The situation was complicated by the results of the mid-term elections, which strengthened the Republican Senate. In this distribution of political force, it is difficult for the Democrats to put sufficient pressure on the White House to allow discussion on the climate and the Paris Agreements to return to the centre of government action.

Moreover, the geopolitical scenario around the climate could change further with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, which, by its own admission, does not seem to want to undertake a path of decarbonisation and oriented towards a Sustainable Development.

Despite the hostile geopolitical context and a multilateral system that suffers from the multiplication of nationalistic tendencies, the 24th Conference of Parties (COP) of UNFCCC

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Retrieved at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/10/13/conclusions-paris-agreement-and-unfccc-meetings/>

<sup>172</sup> The Talanoa Dialogue is a process designed to help countries implement and enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions by 2020. The Dialogue was mandated by the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change to take stock of the collective global efforts to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement, which is to limit the rise in average global temperature to 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C.

Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/topics/2018-talanoa-dialogue-platform>

<sup>173</sup> Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0028&from=EN>

members was organized in Poland<sup>174</sup>. The Katowice Conference, held from 3 to 14 December 2018, to date has been the last significant international summit aimed at the pursuit of Sustainable Development and took place exactly halfway between the signing of the Paris Agreements of 2015, when 197 countries committed to contain climate change within 2°C, and 2020, when the effects of the Agreements are expected to translate into government actions. In a symbolic city like Katowice - the beating heart of Poland fueled mainly by coal and not interested in accelerating the process of ecological transition - it was foreseeable that the negotiations would have been very complex due to the very nature of the discussion to be tackled. The Paris Agreements, in fact, signalled a full awareness among global governments of the need to undertake commitments to combat climate change, but in Poland it was necessary to define the modalities and strategies for action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit energy consumption in order to achieve what is referred to as the challenge of the century. In Katowice, opposing interests met and clashed again. For developing countries, the difficulty has been to combine the need to preserve the environment with the continuation - at a sustained rate - of industrialization processes. On the other hand, developed countries were convinced of the need for common rules and transparent control and monitoring mechanisms, to concretely verify and disseminate correctly the progress made by each in the reduction of emissions. Then there were some countries that represented areas of the world that will suffer the effects of global warming and are dramatically exposed to the consequences of climate change and the risks associated with a lack of timely intervention, such as the Maldives and the Republic of Vanuatu. These countries have launched an unequivocal message, underlining the need to reconsider the language on climate change and take seriously the alarming reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). According to the IPCC analysis, in fact, in the absence of a decisive course correction, the average global temperature could rise by 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels already between 2030 and 2052, exposing the planet to serious risks from the climatic point of view and environmental<sup>175</sup>.

However, at the end of the Conference of the Parties, the 196 member states of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) managed to translate the Paris Climate Agreement into rules of international law, in a complicated context based on unanimously consensus. The tiring agreement on the expected “Paris Rulebook” containing the guidelines for the implementation of the Paris agreement had been agreed. The Paris

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<sup>174</sup> Katowice Climate Change Conference, December 2018. Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/katowice>

<sup>175</sup> IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, 2018. Retrieved at <https://www.ipcc.ch/>



Agreement Work Program (PAWP), commonly called as “Paris Rulebook<sup>176</sup>”, collects the rules that States must follow to realize their commitments and their climatic results, preserves the original spirit of the Paris Agreement by establishing a framework common to all members, which guarantees a certain transparency and at the same time a certain flexibility for developing countries. The 256 pages of the "Katowice climate package<sup>177</sup>" produced by COP24 indicate in detail how member states will have to provide information on the commitments adopted and the actions taken on climate and environment, from mitigation measures to adaptation measures. On the other side, it remains little clarity on the issue of climate finance and the rules for accounting for it. The member states have committed themselves to providing quantitative and qualitative relationships that can guarantee transparency and oblige them to respond to their commitments, without however establishing clear common criteria. Inevitably, in order to conclude the COP24 with an agreement, some points of the agenda remained pending and were postponed to COP25 of 2019, such as a possible agreement on the carbon markets<sup>178</sup>.

The most remarkable thing in Katowice was the true absence of a global political response to the height of the urgency of the climate crisis. Notwithstanding the proliferation of alarm cries on the acceleration of warming and the need to do more and faster, in the final decision the leaders did not collectively commit - in a formal manner - to revising their ambitions for gas emission reductions by 2020 greenhouse effect, in line with the critical threshold of 1.5°C<sup>179</sup>.

Despite this lack, positive signs and more progressive and ambitious positions are to be noted outside the official decision of COP24, such as the statements of the “High Ambition Coalition”, a group of developing countries and developing the highest level of ambition in the international climate talks, which includes the European Union and other countries, is committed to improving its national climate plans and increasing its short- and long-term actions<sup>180</sup>. The EU, on the one hand, presented itself to COP24 and strengthened its image as leader of the action for climate and Sustainable Development, but on the other hand it will not hide the burdensome financing granted to fossil fuels, which according to international organization Bankwatch, which monitors projects financed with public money, continue to be

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<sup>176</sup> Paris Agreement Work Programme. Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/paris-agreement-work-programme>

<sup>177</sup> Katowice Climate Package. Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/news/new-era-of-global-climate-action-to-begin-under-paris-climate-change-agreement-0>

<sup>178</sup> <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2018/12/16/the-uns-latest-climate-meeting-ends-positively>

<sup>179</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/15/climate/cop24-katowice-climate-summit.html>

<sup>180</sup> COP24: EU and allies in breakthrough agreement to step up ambition. Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/news/cop24-eu-and-allies-breakthrough-agreement-step-ambition\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/news/cop24-eu-and-allies-breakthrough-agreement-step-ambition_en)

substantial, to the detriment of Community policies in favor of the green economy. The analysis by Bankwatch shows that fossil fuels have obtained significant resources both from the EIB, the European Investment Bank and from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), financing specific projects. In fact, between 2013 and 2017, if the EIB allocated € 18.4 billion to renewables, at the same time, it indirectly financed the energy with high CO2 emissions with € 11.8 billion allocating capital to initiatives to low environmental impact but realized by companies that concentrate their activity on fossil fuels and are strengthened thanks to European funding<sup>181</sup>.

Beyond the above-mentioned findings, in order to improve European governance by orienting it towards Sustainable Development, more attention needs to be given to the objectives of the "Europe 2020" Strategy rather than to the recommendations made in structural policies, which are geared exclusively to achieve greater economic growth and contain the deficit and public debt.

On September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an extraordinary joint commitment by countries to bring the world on the path of sustainability through 17 SDGs and 169 related targets to be achieved by 2030. The adoption of the new 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, on the one hand and the ratification of the Paris Agreements on the other, has put the EU in front of many complex challenges that do not exclusively concern the inclusion of the SDGs in their own programs in the short and medium term to identify adequate policies for the pursuit of Sustainable Development. To support this paradigmatic change at the global level, it is essential to define on the conceptual level a new model of development that goes beyond GDP and that avoids relying solely on quantitative growth but brings the quality of life of human beings at the center of development and in harmony with the environment.

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<sup>181</sup> numerous publications concerning the financing of the aforementioned European financial institutions towards the fossil industry can be found on the official website retrieved at <https://bankwatch.org/>



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SDGs and Italy

#### *I. The ASviS Report 2018*

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda has expressed a clear opinion on the unsustainability of the current development model by affirming an integrated vision of the different dimensions of development: economic, social and environmental, which are closely related to each other and therefore each objective cannot be considered independently but must be pursued on the basis of a systemic approach. The great opportunity we have to face today is to channel the efforts put into place to shape all our actions on sustainability with a view to integrating national and international policies. Each country has the task of declining the 2030 Agenda taking into account its situation to contribute in different ways to bring the whole world on a path of Sustainable Development.

Based on previous considerations, Italy has taken steps to put sustainability at the center of its policies, involving civil society and networking the different sectors. The main initiative on this theme is represented by the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), founded in February 2016 at the initiative of the Unipolis Foundation and the University of Tor Vergata. To date, ASviS includes more than 180 institutions and networks of civil society and is part of two important international subjects such as the ESDN (European Sustainable Development Network)<sup>182</sup>, which since 2003 deals with strategic policies for Sustainable Development and the association SDG Watch Europe<sup>183</sup>, which through the work carried out by Eurostat<sup>184</sup> - the Statistical Office of the European Union using a set of specially

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<sup>182</sup> The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is an informal network of public administrators and other experts dealing with sustainable development (SD) strategies in Europe. Retrieved at <https://www.sd-network.eu/>

<sup>183</sup> The Steering Group (SG) functions as the board of SDG Watch Europe. It is re-elected every two years. All SDG Watch members are eligible to be elected to the SG. The SG meets once a month in Brussels. The task of the SG members is to facilitate the functioning of SDG Watch Europe and to represent the network at the European level. Retrieved at <https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/>

<sup>184</sup> Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union situated in Luxembourg. Retrieved at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/home>

designed indicators called Sustainable Development Indicators (SDI) - monitors the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Development Sustainable in Europe<sup>185</sup>.

The mission of the ASviS is to raise the awareness of the importance of the 2030 Agenda for the future of Italy in the Italian society, in the economic subjects and in the institutions, networking those who already deal with the specific aspects included in the SDGs to spread in the country the culture of sustainability.

In 2017, Italy adopts the 2030 Agenda with the “Strategia nazionale per lo sviluppo sostenibile 2017-2030 (SNSvS)<sup>186</sup>”, which today is the pillar on which we must build Italy in the coming decades. The provision addresses the profound interrelation between environmental dynamics and economic and social growth starting from the 17 SDGs indicated by the United Nations. This Strategy conceptually represents the change of profound paradigm, a dividing line with a socio-economic model of growth built on a production that has too much impact on the environment and on a poor management of our natural resources. Unquestionably, a new model of development is essential in which the environment is key to social and economic change, since the environment reduces inequalities and improves people's quality of life.

The five "P" (people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership) on which the strategy is structured, with respect to which targets and consequent monitoring actions will be identified, all lead back to the great environmental challenge. Among the objectives of the document is the fight against poverty and social exclusion by eliminating territorial gaps, promoting health and well-being, halting the loss of biodiversity, ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources, promoting research and innovation environmentally friendly, decarbonise the economy, ensure legality and justice, safeguard cultural and natural heritage, through a high level scientific contribution and a great sharing with many stakeholders at all levels.

ASviS has actively contributed to the definition of the “Strategia nazionale per lo sviluppo sostenibile 2017-2030 (SNSvS)”, elaborated thanks to the work of the Ministero dell’Ambiente e della tutela del territorio e del mare (MATTM) in collaboration with the civil society and presented in July 2017 to High-Level Political Forum, the annual meeting of the UN for the evaluation of the progress made with respect to the SDGs in which ASviS also took

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<sup>185</sup> Sustainable development indicators (SDI), aim to measure sustainable development over longer periods of time. The indicator set comprises 100 indicators that are structured along the 17 SDGs. Each goal has 6 indicators primarily attributed to it, except for goals 14 and 17 which only have 5. 42 of the 100 indicators are multipurpose, i.e. are used to monitor more than one SDG. All indicators are grouped in sub-themes to underline interlinkages and highlight different aspects of each SDG.

<sup>186</sup>“Strategia nazionale per lo sviluppo sostenibile 2017-2030 (SNSvS)” Retrieved at <http://www.minambiente.it/pagina/la-strategia-nazionale-lo-sviluppo-sostenibile>

part, representing Italian civil society. The Strategy, which represents an important milestone for Italy, embraces the entire spectrum of SDGs and will be carried out under the direct responsibility of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and with the continuing involvement of civil society. “Strategia nazionale per lo sviluppo sostenibile” is a government program and a plan for the future of our country that has a fundamental requirement for implementation, strengthening our ability to work in partnership with innovative forms of institutional collaboration and the contribution of the private and non-private sector. To this end, the need emerges to better coordinate programs and targets with the commitments made by our country at international and European level, and to evaluate the resources to be associated with the actions included in the Strategy to make them coherent with government action and economic availability. As can be noted, it is necessary to adopt a new inclusive approach able to involve all the components of the company and to design open and participatory decision-making and implementation processes.

The “Strategia energetica nazionale (SEN) 2030<sup>187</sup>” was born in parallel with the “Strategia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile” which will outline the horizon of the energy sector as an enabler of sustainable growth in the country and will indicate the objectives of diversifying energy sources, enhancing infrastructures, the promotion of renewable sources and energy efficiency, the strengthening of research in the energy sector and environmental sustainability in energy production and uses. A third strategy, previously approved in June 2015, was the “Strategia Nazionale di Adattamento ai Cambiamenti Climatici (SNAC)<sup>188</sup>”, which identifies the main impacts of climate change for a number of socio-economic and natural sectors and proposes adaptation actions. In May 2016 the elaboration of the National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change (PNACC) was started to stimulate the implementation of the SNAC, which will represent the updated picture of climate trends in Italy and future scenarios, analyzing the impacts and territorial vulnerabilities.

However, some serious delays remain with respect to the SDGs, especially in the adoption of fundamental strategies for the future of the country, from energy to the fight against climate change. For this reason, the question to ask is: what is the current situation of Italy today compared to the Sustainable Development Goals indicated by 2030 Agenda?

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<sup>187</sup> Strategia energetica nazionale (SEN) 2030, November 2017.

Retrieved at <https://www.mise.gov.it/index.php/it/energia/strategia-energetica-nazionale>

<sup>188</sup> Strategia Nazionale di Adattamento ai Cambiamenti Climatici (SNAC).

Retrieved at <http://www.minambiente.it/notizie/strategia-nazionale-di-adattamento-ai-cambiamenti-climatici-0>

The answer to this question is the focus of this chapter, which moves to Italy, as an EU member state, to analyze the current state of our country with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda.

In this regard, the ASviS Report 2018<sup>189</sup> perfectly portrays the situation of Italy with respect to the SDGs and to the “Strategia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile (2017-2030)” and draws scenarios for the evolution of our country to 2030 according to the different policies adopted. The Report also contains an assessment of the actions implemented by the government in the last year in the economic, social and environmental fields, and proposes the policies that should be undertaken in the coming months and years to bring Italy on a path of Sustainable Development. Through the use of an integrated macroeconomic model with social and environmental components able to generate 2030 projections of a set of 28 indicators representative of the different SDGs and referred to 45 geo-political areas of the world (individual countries or macro-regions), it was possible to assess Italy's performance based on both the distance between the values assigned to the different Goals and those generated by the model, and through a synthetic index, which offers an overall measure of the distance from the achievement of all the SDGs.

The picture that emerges from the 2018 Report of the Alleanza Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile (ASviS) shows, according to the composite indicators<sup>190</sup> presented in the Report, that some objectives have registered a significant deterioration over the last few years. Since 2010, Italy has worsened in five areas of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda concerning poverty, the economic and employment situation, social inequalities, the conditions of cities and the terrestrial ecosystem:

- Goal 1 – No poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere. Economic growth must be inclusive to provide sustainable jobs and promote equality

The ASviS 2018 Report shows a worsening situation regarding Goal 1 in Italy. Despite the conditions of housing and access to treatment for young people show signs of improvement, in Italy worsens relative and absolute poverty in most regions. In fact, even if the number of

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<sup>189</sup> ASviS Report 2018. Retrieved at <http://asvis.it/rapporto-asvis-2018/>

<sup>190</sup> the composite indicator Apps (Assessment, Projection and Policy of Sustainable Development Goals) offers a measure of current well-being and future sustainability obtained by summarizing 28 indicators, which in turn represent 16 of the 17 SDGs, which are a subset of those identified by UN. Given the structure of the model, Goal 5 (gender equality) remains excluded, although some indicators of other Goals (in particular 1.4.8, 10 and 17) also concern the condition of women.

people living in problematic homes has decreased - those who do not have access to some medical treatment and families who cannot afford adequate heating - the absolute and relative poverty has worsened as well as the number of individuals in low labor intensity families. At regional level, the situation is particularly negative for Sicily and Campania, while there is an improvement in Basilicata and in Veneto thanks to the decrease in the household economic difficulty index. From 1999 to 2013, the number of people in the world living below the extreme poverty line fell 28%, from 1.7 billion to 767 million. In Italy, families in absolute poverty were 1.6 million in 2016, for a total of 4.7 million individuals, the highest level since 2005. The Italian legislative activity of the last year has been characterized by some steps forward constituted by the introduction of the “Reddito di Inclusione (REI)<sup>191</sup>”, but the measures adopted are still insufficient to respond to the different needs of a multidimensional phenomenon such as poverty. The actions so far planned are therefore not adequate to cover several Goal 1 targets, especially the target 1.2 (to reduce at least half the percentage of poverty in all its dimensions), 1.3 (Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems) and 1.4 (have equal rights to economic resources, basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance). ASviS proposes to continue on the path undertaken with the ReI, making the future “Reddito di cittadinanza<sup>192</sup>” a truly universal and adequate measure, and to include precise commitments in the Budget Law that will guarantee, especially for young and numerous families, an effective fight against the poverty in the medium and long term.

- Goal 8 - Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. Sustainable economic growth will require societies to create the conditions that allow people to have quality jobs.

Globally, the average annual growth in GDP per capita has increased from 0.9% in 2005-2009 to 1.6% in 2010-2015. In developing countries, the percentage rose from 3.5% to

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<sup>191</sup> The “Reddito di Inclusione (REI)” is the universal national aid against the poverty of families residing in Italy. REI came into force from 1 January 2018 but will be absorbed by the new “Reddito di cittadinanza” definitively approved in the new Budget Law 2019.

<sup>192</sup> it is a cash aid designed for all residents in Italy, regardless of whether or not they have a job. Measure to be included in the Budget Law 2019, is intended for all persons who have income from work or pension too low and therefore below the poverty threshold established by ISTAT: 780 euros. The disbursement of the subsidy is conditional on the commitment to adhere to job offers that will be proposed by the employment centers: those who do not accept, would lose the income of citizenship.

4.6%. Also in Italy, GDP per capita has started to rise again (+ 1.2%), but in 2015 the South of Italy represented 47% of that of the North-West. The employment rate in 2016 stood at 57.2%.

The ASviS Report documents an overall deterioration in Goal 8 in Italy. On the one hand, employment and GDP per capita are growing, on the other we are still far from pre-crisis levels. The unemployment rate is still almost double compared to pre-crisis levels and part of the new employment has characteristics of fragmentation and precariousness; in particular, the number and the share of part-time contracts for economic reasons (not by choice of the worker) have greatly increased. At the territorial level, the unemployment rate and the proportion of people aged 15 to 29 who do not work and do not study (Neet) have worsened.

In the last year, the Italian legislation on labor and economic growth have moved forward, focusing on measures to boost productivity, promote entrepreneurship, overcome territorial imbalances and improve the youth situation in the labor market.

According to the ASviS, it is urgent to define a multi-year plan that puts all actions aimed at supporting youth employment as a common factor. It is also necessary to increase the efficiency of the production system in combining capital and labor factors. Finally, it is proposed to reallocate the resources of the current subsidies harmful to the environment to stimulate the social and solidarity economy.

- Goal 10 – Reduce Inequalities within and among countries. To reduce inequalities, policies should be universal in principle, paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized populations.

The ASviS Report 2018 recorded a significant deterioration in Goal 10, also at the regional level. Inequalities continue to grow. Compared to the values in 2010, in particular, the Valle D'Aosta settles in 2016 at a lower level than the national average, while Lombardy, remains above the average. The regions that have registered a marked improvement compared to 2010 are Abruzzo and Basilicata.

The ASviS Report 2018 suggests strengthening interventions, including new measures to make access to basic services more equitable.

The wealth gap between the high-income and low-income population continues to grow, but above all the share of families living in conditions of absolute poverty increases, due to the severe recession that has hit the country and especially the South, so much that the number of families below the absolute poverty line has almost doubled in the last ten years and now involves many younger people and even working people. Although since December 2017,

with the “Reddito di inclusione (ReI)”, new tools to combat poverty have been introduced and also measures to reduce inequalities in access to basic services. In the face of such broad accentuation of inequalities, the absence of convergence of policies aimed at reducing them is serious. The ASviS Report 2018 highlights the urgent need to extend and strengthen specific income support measures to eradicate absolute poverty and make proposals, especially to ensure equality of access to basic services, make the tax system more equitable, reduce income gaps within the workplace itself and protect the universal and public nature of welfare systems.

- Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities: make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. There needs to be a future in which cities provide opportunities for all, with access to basic services, energy, housing, transportation and more.

In 2015, 54% of the world's population (4 billion people) lived in cities, while it is expected that by 2030 there will be a total of five billion people living in urban areas. In Italy, in 2015, 11.3% of the population suffered from housing problems in densely populated areas, compared to an EU average of 5.2%.

According to the ASviS Report 2018, despite the deterioration of the indicators on cities compared to 2010, there are signs of growth because of the improvement of housing and waste management. Despite the steady deterioration since 2010, a slight improvement is visible from 2016. In fact, the conditions of housing and the share of urban waste sent to landfill have improved, while issues related to illegal and public transport remain critical. The Italian legislative activity of the last year was characterized by some progress made by the approval of the final report of the “Commissione d’inchiesta della Camera dei Deputati” on the degradation and security conditions of cities and their suburbs, from the approval of the Law No.2 of 2018 on the promotion of the use of the bicycle as a means of transport and, to overcome the emergency smog, the signing of a new program agreement between the Ministry of Environment and the regions of the Po Valley. However, the measures taken are still insufficient to respond to the different needs of cities. Therefore, the ASviS Report proposes, starting from the analysis contained in the “Agenda urbana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile”, to improve the conditions of schools and universities, to launch a National Plan for water distribution networks, to encourage the creation of startups and creative economy, adopt a national action plan that fortify the public transport network, define a plan between state and regions to reduce land consumption, increase air quality controls and protect green areas.

- Goal 15 – Life on Land: sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

Between 2010 and 2015, the annual loss of forest areas was less than half that in 1990, but the loss of biodiversity continues at alarming rates. In Italy the process of approval of the Law on the consumption of soil has not been concluded and, between June and July 2017, over 26 thousand hectares of wooded areas have been burnt, equal to 93.8% of the total area burnt by intention or fault throughout 2016.

The ASviS Report 2018 shows a worsening in the case of Goal 15. In our country heavy threats are still weighing on the endangered species of vertebrates at risk of extinction due mainly to the high consumption of soil and the fragmentation of the territory. At the territorial level, the regions with the highest levels are Lombardy and Veneto. In order to try to stem this trend in the last year the approval process of the Law on the consumption of soil was started (see XVII Legislature As No. 2383<sup>193</sup>), but it has not been concluded. The attempt of this law was to introduce the principle that the consumption of soil is allowed only in cases where there are no consistent alternatives to the reuse of already urbanized areas and in the regeneration of the same and favored, in its direct effects, the arrest of the loss of biodiversity.

Privileging action plans in harmony with nature is among the proposals of the ASviS Report 2018. In order to face these difficulties, ASviS calls for effective and concrete government action on natural resources that works by integrating social and economic policies with environmental measures. To this end, the government must provide itself with adequate ex-ante and ex-post evaluation tools on the effects of different environmental policies, considering that any act that reduces the availability of natural capital produces damage to the community and to future generations.

Furthermore, from the 2018 Report of the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), it emerges that for four areas that belong to the SDGs, such as water and sanitation, the energy system, the condition of the seas and finally the quality of governance, peace, justice and solid institutions, the situation has remained unchanged over the last few years:

- Goal 6 - Ensure access to water and sanitation for all: clean, accessible water for all is an essential part of the world we want to live in.

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<sup>193</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.senato.it/leg/17/BGT/Schede/Ddliter/46877.htm>



In 2015, 90% of the planet's population improved their drinking water sources and 4.9 billion citizens had access to a safer network of sanitation. However, over 2 billion people live under water stress. In Italy the lack of water is a national emergency: in the summer of 2017 ten Regions declared the state of calamity.

However, the ASviS Report 2018 records improvements in Goal 6 in Italy up to 2014, followed by a two-year reduction period determined by the decrease in the efficiency of drinking water distribution networks which caused a sharp turnaround. The need for a law on public water management was shared by the President of the Chamber of Deputies Roberto Fico in the meeting held on 30 July 2018 with the “Italian Forum for Water Movements”, during which he reiterated his commitment to theme and affirmed that the application of the 2011 referendum result passes exclusively through forms of management such as public law bodies, special companies and special consortium companies. Recognizing the human right to water and intervening on the networks are among the ASviS proposals. It is necessary to introduce the recognition and quantification of the human right to water with a minimum free vital level for all, removed from market rules, providing for the activation of an international solidarity fund for international cooperation projects aimed at guaranteeing access to water in the poorest countries, encouraging the commitment of local authorities and participatory forms to protect this resource as expressed by the proposal of the “Carta delle Città per il Diritto all’Acqua<sup>194</sup>”.

- Goal 7 - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy. Energy is central to nearly every major challenge and opportunity.

In 2016, 85% of the world's population had access to electricity, while in 2000 the percentage was 72%. But still 1.1 billion people live without electricity and 2.8 billion have no way to cook cleanly. In Italy, the growth of renewable energy sources in primary energy led the relative share from 6-8% in the early 2000s to just under 20% in 2016. Italy struggles in the energy transition and moves away from the 2030 Agenda. The ASviS 2018 Report records for Goal 7 in Italy a fundamentally static situation between 2010 and 2016. In fact, after an initial improvement in energy efficiency up to 2012, our country returned to its 2010 levels. The reasons for this stagnation, above all, is an increase in energy consumption (+1.3%),

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<sup>194</sup> Retrieved at <http://festivalsvilupposostenibile.it/2018/cal/644/le-citta-e-lacqua-per-una-carta-delle-citta-per-il-diritto-umano-allacqua#.XFAfEFxKjIU>

accompanied by a decline in the contribution from renewables (-4.3%). Secondly, the lack of a reform of the “Strategia Energetica Nazionale (SEN)”, still based on fossil carbon and an effective promotion of the Carbon Tax are necessary. Thirdly, the lack of presence of the energy question within the national political debate. A clear improvement, despite the uneven developments, is found in some regions, where the use of alternative energy goes from 22% (2010) to 33% (2017) as in Valle d'Aosta, Basilicata and Sardinia, while unsatisfactory results can be observed for Marche and Calabria. The ASviS Report therefore proposes to modify and implement the “Strategia Energetica Nazionale”, to effectively introduce the Carbon Tax to achieve grid parity - the point where the electricity produced by plants powered by renewable energy sources has the same price as the energy produced by conventional energy sources, ie fossil sources, or alternative energy sources such as nuclear power - and involve towns and regions for the diffusion of renewables.

- Goal 14 – Life below Water: conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

Of the 63 marine ecosystems surveyed by the UN, 16% are at risk or seriously at risk for coastal eutrophication. Overfishing has reduced food production, damaged ecosystems and decreased biodiversity. In Italy, over-exploitation of fish stocks is the main problem, with an 88% share in 2014.

As regards the protection of the seas, in Italy no change is shown either from the legislative point of view nor from the indicators.

The ASviS Report 2018 does not record a particular change in Goal 14 compared to 2010 levels that remained almost unchanged.

No new regulations on the theme of the sea have taken place in the last year. In fact, the Italian regulatory framework, which derives from the “Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC<sup>195</sup>” on the strategy for the marine environment, imposing the achievement in 2020 of the “Buono Stato Ecologico (BSE)”, already would respond in large part to the achievement of different targets of Goal 14, but there are no adequate management tools for putting it into practice.

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<sup>195</sup> Marine Strategy Framework Directive, DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 June 2008.  
Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32008L0056>

On the basis of these shortcomings, ASviS asks the government to take all the measures envisaged by the Directive, ensuring that the human and material resources committed for this purpose are adequate and commensurate with the environmental, economic and social interest of the marine ecosystem for our country.

- Goal 16 - Revitalize the global partnership for Sustainable Development: access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels.

On a global level, the number of victims of voluntary homicides in 2015 stood between 4.6 and 6.8 victims per 100,000 people, and many forms of violence against children persist. In Italy, many measures have been taken to promote justice and solid institutions. Steps forward have been made for justice and also for the efficiency of the penal system, but the participation of citizens in decision-making processes remains low.

The ASviS Report 2018 registers for Goal 16 in Italy a fundamentally static situation in 2016 compared to 2010. In fact, after an initial worsening, since 2014 there has been a significant improvement thanks to the reduction in the average duration of civil proceedings, which in 2016 Valle D'Aosta reaches its lowest value. However, despite this improvement in recent years, the average duration for the civil proceedings of ordinary courts remains high (445 average days in 2017).

At the regulatory level, some progress has been made in the area of justice. In particular, some decrees implementing the law of 23 June 2017 no.103<sup>196</sup> (known as the “Orlando reform”) intervene on the justice system with the aim of improving the efficiency of the penal system. To combat corruption, the “whistleblowing law” (Law 30 November 2017, n.179), which protects workers who report illicit conduct. In order to reinforce the culture of legality, ASviS proposes to educate in the fight against the Mafia since school age, to draw up a common code of conduct at the political and administrative level to prevent the onset of corruption and favoring the mafia, as well as expanding the use of the legality rating (in implementation of the principles of the new Procurement Code to be defined for this year), partly revising the operating system, so that it can effectively become a useful tool to prevent the emergence and spread of corruption in occasion of calls for tenders for public and infrastructural works.

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<sup>196</sup> Law of 23 June 2017, n.103 on amendments to the penal code, the code of criminal procedure and the penitentiary system. Retrieved at <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/07/4/17G00116/sg>

However, from the 2018 Report of the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) there are also signs of improvement with regard to food and sustainable agriculture, health, education, gender equality, innovation, sustainable models of production and consumption, fight against climate change, international cooperation.

- Goal 2 – Zero Hunger: The food and agriculture sector offer key solutions for development and is central for hunger and poverty eradication.

In recent years global food insecurity has resumed growing for the first time since 2003 and today 815 million people are suffering from hunger. In Italy, agriculture records positive results in terms of eco-efficiency, but the phenomena of labour exploitation and tax evasion remain. According to the ASviS Report 2018, the Italian agricultural and nutritional system is improving but must become circular and also counteract food poverty and strengthen the collaboration of the research world with local operators.

The ASviS 2018 Report records progress in Goal 2 in Italy. In fact, the agricultural area dedicated to organic farming has increased and the productivity and profitability of small farms is improved. At regional level, the picture is particularly positive in Lazio, while there are worsening in Molise and Puglia due to the decrease in the index of good nutrition.

The Italian legislative activity of the last year has adopted some measures that will have a positive impact on the four dimensions that characterize the Goal 2 targets: the overcoming of food poverty (defined as the difficulty of access to an adequate maintenance diet), the impact of the food system on health, the sustainability of agriculture and its role in the Italian strategy for development cooperation.

Nevertheless, ASviS proposes to incentivize the accountability of the actors of the agri-food system, to invest in processes of social innovation to increase the fight against food poverty, direct the agro-industry to the circular economy model, conduct food education campaigns and encourage collaboration between university research and local operators to develop innovations.

- Goal 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages is essential to Sustainable Development.

In the world, between 2000 and 2015, maternal mortality rates and children under the age of 5 fell respectively by 37% and 44%. The incidence of HIV, tuberculosis and malaria also decreased. In Italy, despite progress, strong inequalities persist in the face of health provision, in terms of access and quality.

The ASviS 2018 Report records progress in Goal 3 in Italy, especially for the reduction in mortality rates, road accidents and the percentage of caesarean sections. At the local level, the only region that worsens compared to 2010 levels is Valle D'Aosta. The health of Italians has improved but inequalities, the culture of prevention, disability and waste remain critical.

The focus of the Italian legislative activity of the last year has been on prevention, health governance and disability. The attention of the public opinion was attracted by the issue of vaccination coverage for school-aged children. The most important recent government act regarding the implementation of the SDGs concerns the establishment in January 2018, at the Ministry of Health, of a national task force to support environmental policies.

According to the Alliance, to further improve health in Italy we must move from traditional prevention to the “health promotion” promoted by the Ottawa Charter<sup>197</sup>, whose environmental and social components represent the fundamental pillars. To promote a holistic view of well-being and health, ASviS proposes a “Decalogue on health”, which is based on evaluation indicators of the results achieved and which contains tailor-made proposals on Italy, where the most important critical issues in the health sector concerns inequalities, prevention in the sense just mentioned, the integration of social-health services in the area, long-term care for the chronic and disabled, the fight against waste and the development of a widespread and conscious health culture.

- Goal 4 - Obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people’s lives and sustainable development.

In 2014, two out of three children attended elementary school, but only four out of ten in the most backward countries. In Italy, the rate of completion of tertiary studies has increased and early livings from the education and training system have diminished, but many 15-year-olds do not reach the minimum threshold of skills to be able to orientate themselves in studies and work.

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<sup>197</sup> The first International Conference on Health Promotion, meeting in Ottawa this 21st day of November 1986, hereby presents “The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion” for action to achieve Health for All by the year 2000 and beyond. Retrieved at <https://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/>

The ASviS Report 2018 records improvements in Goal 4 in Italy, especially as regards the increase in the number of people aged 30-34 with university degrees and the decrease in the rate of early leaving of the education and training system in all regions compared to the 2010. Among the most important facts in the school context, it must be noted the conclusion of the first three-year courses of alternating school-work (Asl), a useful initiative that presents several critical issues, and the approval of “the Italian strategy for education to global citizenship<sup>198</sup>” by the “Consiglio Nazionale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (Cncs)”, the result of a link between institutions, civil society and universities, which has already been transformed into operational indications by some Regions. Thus, the level of education of Italians has improved but the standards of the European Union are still very far. According to ASviS, European standards in the field of education can be achieved by Italy if a more appropriate allocation of resources for training and the re-motivation of many teachers in service is carried out and, as regards tertiary education, if the increase of the resources of the “Fondo integrativo statale<sup>199</sup>” for the granting of university scholarships will be favored.

- Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

Between 2005 and 2016, in 87 countries around the world, 19% of women aged 15 to 49 reported having suffered physical or sexual violence from a partner in the last 12 months. Furthermore, women are still under represented in managerial positions. In Italy, the female employment rate is among the lowest in Europe and, for the same jobs, women receive lower salaries.

The ASviS Report 2018 records improvements in Goal 5 in Italy. Despite the recent decline in the synthetic indicator, overall women's participation in economic and political decision-making places increases, even if the presence remains low. At the local level, the presence of women in most of the Regional Councils is growing.

In the last year, the Italian legislation on gender equality has made significant steps forward, focusing on the relief and assistance to women victims of violence, gender medicine,

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<sup>198</sup> “Strategia italiana per l'Educazione alla Cittadinanza Globale”, 2018.

Retrieved at <https://www.aics.gov.it/news/2018/20618/>

<sup>199</sup> The “Fondo integrativo statale” for the granting of scholarships is a budget that every year the Italian State grants to the Regions to participate in the expenses related to the right to education.

work-family reconciliation measures and paternity leave. Therefore, measures against gender-based violence have improved but women's participation in decision-making bodies remains much lower than the EU average.

According to ASviS, serious delays and shortcomings are observed on the implementation level. More efforts are needed to overcome gender stereotypes, improve sexual health and ensure full respect for reproductive rights. Even if protection measures for women have increased, anti-violence centers and shelters should be strengthened, and crimes related to sexism should be introduced into the “Law on hate crimes and discrimination<sup>200</sup>” of 1993, known as “Mancino Law”.

- Goal 9 - Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. Investments in infrastructure are crucial to achieving Sustainable Development.

Globally, the funds allocated to Research and Development amounted to 1.7% of GDP in 2014, compared to 1.5% in 2000. Italy has made progress especially in the ICT (Information and Communications Technologies): 97 % of homes have access to fixed networks at speeds of between 2 and 20 Mbit/s, while broadband fixed-line lines with speeds of 10 Mbit/s or more have exceeded 50% of the total.

The ASviS Report 2018 summarizes the path taken by Goal 9 in recent years, recognizing that progress towards digitization has been made but they are often not very incisive compared to the needs of our country, which is not in step with the world leaders. There is a clear improvement for the Goal 9 in all the Italian regions, Emilia-Romagna in the lead, thanks also to the excellent results of the manufacturing industry. At the same time, however, the incidence of research and development (R & D) expenses on GDP grew by only 0.3 percentage points in ten years, remaining very far from the EU average, especially considering the strong gap between the North and South. Italy has improved in the diffusion of broadband and in the digitalization but continues to have a structural delay in the investments in infrastructures and R&D.

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<sup>200</sup> The law of 25 June 1993, n. 205, known as “Mancino Law”, is a legislative act of the Italian Republic that sanctions and condemns gestures, actions and slogans linked to Nazi-Fascist ideology, and whose purpose is to incite violence and discrimination on racial, ethnic, religious or national grounds. The law also punishes the use of symbols associated with the aforementioned political movements.

Regarding the infrastructures, the annex to the Economic and Financial Document (DEF) 2018, in which all the economic and financial policies decided by our government are written down, shows that, despite the strategies used in these years, the overall results in terms of public investment remain disappointing: the final result for 2017 reported an expense of 33.7 billion euro, with a reduction of 2 billion euro (-5.6%) compared to 2016 and 5.6 billion euro (-9,6%) compared to 2015.

The ASviS Report proposes to invest more in innovation, particularly in research and development, and in infrastructures. In addition, it makes several proposals to improve physical infrastructure, for example through a “National Plan for the Modernization of Water Distribution Networks” and the implementation of a significant project to make goods transport more efficient.

- Goal 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Globally, the Material Footprint (MF)<sup>201</sup>, which indicates the flows of mineral and organic resources that have been removed from the environment to produce a good, has gone from 48.5 billion tons in 2000 to 69.3 billion tons in 2010. In Italy, more responsible production and consumption patterns are emerging, but citizens must be sensitized to reduce waste.

The ASviS Report 2018 reveals an overall improvement in Goal 12 in Italy. Regarding the environmental dimension, the growing attention and sensitivity of Italian society towards the issue of responsible production and consumption is leading to an increase in recycling, as well as a reduction in energy and material consumption, even if partly due to the economic crisis. A similar sensitivity must be developed with reference to the social dimension.

The Italian legislation of the last year on responsible finance, production and consumption has made progress, focusing on the sustainability and traceability of food products, on non-financial declarations and on the quality of services offered by the public sector.

According to ASviS, in order to fully realize the Goal 12 targets, it cannot be ignored the notion of responsible finance. In fact, as citizens are as much consumers as savers, production and consumption must also be thought of in terms of financial services. For Goal 12, it is proposed to evaluate the impact of investments on the different dimensions of well-being and to widen the scope of the decree that transposes the EU directive on non-financial

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<sup>201</sup> Material Footprint (MF). Retrieved at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>



reporting. Furthermore, it is necessary to strengthen the transition to the circular economy, which can minimize the withdrawal of resources - for biological ones are re-incorporated into the atmosphere, for those techniques the use is prolonged - promoting their reuse and putting them back in cycle, thus minimizing the production and disposal of waste, avoiding in this way, the overlap between sectors, fostering partnerships between businesses and consumer associations, complete the path towards a national law on fair trade and complete the reform of the Third Sector.

- Goal 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Climate change is a global challenge that affects everyone, everywhere.

In 2016, global temperatures reached record levels, surpassing the pre-industrial era by 1.1°C. Italy in 2017 produced the proposal of a National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change (PNACC), the creation of the new national strategy for sustainable development 2017 – 2030 (SNSvS) and the announcement of the preparation of the National Climate and Energy Plan 2030.

In fact, the situation in Italy has improved in recent years: the composite indicator (total greenhouse gases according to the emissions accounts) shows that until 2014 there was an improvement largely due to the reduction of emissions, induced from the economic crisis, and then worsen again in the last two years, in line with the recovery of GDP. Given the variety of factors present within the Goal 13 and its inherent inter-territoriality, it was not possible to synthesize the composite indicators with a regional specificity.

The legislative framework with respect to Goal 13 outlines a situation that requires concrete actions to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda. It should be recalled that in Italy between 1995 and 2015 there was a decrease of 20 percentage points in the emissions of greenhouse gases, placing our country even below the European emission average. However, this remarkable result is attributable for 75% to production activities - and therefore to their fall due to the economic crisis - and not to sustainable initiatives.

Moreover, the ASviS Report 2018 recorded 340 extreme weather phenomena from 2010 to today in Italy, which have affected with considerable impacts (inconvenience, damage to infrastructure, victims) 198 municipalities. It should be noted, however, that in 2017, according to the estimates drawn up by the “Istituto superiore per la protezione e la ricerca ambientale (Ispra)”, the greenhouse gas emissions decreased by 0.3% compared to an increase

in the GDP of 1.5%, a sign of an effective decoupling trend between economic development and greenhouse gas emissions.

At international level the commitment on Goal 13 is huge. Over 20 states, regions and local authorities committed themselves to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050 compared to 1990. In this context, the Government should make explicit commitments that it will not retreat from Paris Agreement and will achieve “carbon neutrality<sup>202</sup>” - which means emissions low enough to be safely absorbed by forests, soils and other natural systems - by the middle of the century.

Furthermore, ASviS presents the conclusion of the approval process for the National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation (PNAC) as an essential need. The Alliance also calls for the strengthening of scientific research in areas not covered by the “Strategia Energetica Nazionale (Sen)”, as well as greater involvement of the territories, increasing the independence of mayors in the management of climate adaptation, urban regeneration, sustainable mobility and pollution reduction.

- Goal 17 - Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

In 2016, OECD Official development assistance (ODA) increased by 8.9% and Germany, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom reached the goal set by the UN to bring them to 0.7% of gross national income (GNI). In Italy, the objective is still far away and the approval of the National Fair-Trade Law<sup>203</sup> is awaited.

The ASviS 2018 Report shows a significant improvement from 2014 to 2016 mainly due to the amount of funds allocated to Official development assistance (ODA). Nevertheless, it is necessary to accelerate the implementation of existing laws for international cooperation.

The Italian legislative activity of the last year was characterized by some steps forward with the complete implementation of all the provisions that the Law 125 of 2014 “General

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<sup>202</sup> Carbon-neutrality is the result of a process of quantification, reduction and compensation of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Becoming carbon neutral means having decided to take charge of its environmental impacts, which the market does not normally quantify, and to choose to make their activities not impacting the climate.

<sup>203</sup> Fair Trade Law is aimed at fairness in commercial relations. Fair trade agreement means a long-term agreement entered into with a manufacturer to allow, accompany and improve access to the market of the latter, which includes certain specific characteristics, in particular the payment of a fair price, measures to be taken by the customer for the gradual improvement of production quality and for the development of the local community, the progressive improvement of the levels of environmental impact of production, the obligation of the producer to guarantee safe working conditions and to remunerate in a manner adequate workers and respect trade union rights.

Discipline for international development cooperation<sup>204</sup>” had introduced, from a cost of five million euro in ODA (equal to 0.29% of gross national income) to the modification made by the “Agenzia Italiana per la cooperazione allo sviluppo (AICS)”<sup>205</sup> of the guidelines for the registration of civil society organizations in the list of subjects admitted to the public financing of the cooperation initiatives, but also to the interruption of the National Fair-Trade Law, important to define and recognize the sector, and to guarantee better opportunities for disadvantaged producers in developing countries.

The ASviS report proposes to increase efforts to allocate and manage ODA funds, bringing the percentage closer to 0.7% of the GNI (threshold established at international level), to improve the planning of Italian cooperation through a document that takes into account not only the foreign dimension but also of different objectives concerning international cooperation, introducing universal access to water among the priorities of Italian cooperation for the environment target, relaunching the process for the approval of the national law on fair trade and accelerating the revision of the Minimum Environmental Criteria (Cam)<sup>206</sup>, in place for more than a year in the care of the Ministry of the Environment.

## *II. Italy is not on a path of sustainable development*

As was shown, the Report is also the “bearer” of the initiatives of numerous economic and social subjects that are changing the business, production, consumption and behaviour models, which are demonstrating evident benefits. The Report, in fact, signals the start of educational programs in schools and universities on Sustainable Development, initiatives aimed at involving businesses, local communities and individuals on the various issues of the 2030 Agenda as well as important policies adopted in the last twelve months, as the introduction of the “Reddito di Inclusione (REI)” to reduce poverty and missed opportunities, such as the interruption of legislative procedures concerning the reduction of land consumption, the right to water, fair trade, or the lack of measures to implement the Third Sector reform. An

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<sup>204</sup> Law 125 of 2014 “General Discipline for international development cooperation”. Retrieved at <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2014/08/28/14G00130/sg>

<sup>205</sup> “Agenzia Italiana per la cooperazione allo sviluppo (AICS)” intends to act as an operational platform for the Italian system of cooperation, strengthen it and make it a protagonist in the fight against poverty, the promotion of peace, the defense of rights and the construction of Sustainable Development.

<sup>206</sup> The Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM) are the environmental requirements defined for the various phases of the purchasing process, aimed at identifying the design solution, the product or the best service from an environmental point of view along the life cycle, taking into account the availability of the market.

important signal has been launched since 2017, with the “Strategia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile” which has become the basis for setting the 2017 Budget Law, while the so-called “BES indicator<sup>207</sup>” for a fair and sustainable welfare, assess the progress of a society not only from an economic point of view, but also social and environmental and is a defining factor for the Economic Document and finance.

However, if the Report shows the growing interest of Italian society for the theme of Sustainable Development, on the other hand the composite indicators developed by ASviS provide a worrying view of the trends underway for many Goals. The distances from the other European countries remain very large for our country, where the strong territorial, socio-economic and gender inequalities are in clear contrast with the aforementioned slogan of the 2030 Agenda “no one will be left behind<sup>208</sup>”.

Based on the Apps Index (Assessment, Projection and Policy of Sustainable Development Goals)<sup>209</sup>, Italy currently ranks 15th among the 45 areas considered, but within the European Union, Italian performance is better only than of Czech Republic, Spain and Greece. Overall, Italy is very far from the top of the ranking, occupied by the Scandinavian countries such as Sweden, which ranks first in the world ranking of the Apps index. Italy is strongly lagging behind in the economic dimension, moderately late for the social one, while the environmental one is negatively affected by the inefficient use of water resources and high pollution deriving from the residential and transport sectors.

Indeed, the gap accumulated with many EU countries is the consequence of the last 3 years of government, which have not faced the many problems of the country in an integrated way and, in particular, the confrontation between the political forces in the last elections did not take place around clear and sustainability-oriented policy programs. Although many of the measures taken in the last twelve months go in the right direction, they do not seem able to ensure the achievement of the SDGs and to respect the international commitments taken by Italy, not being included in a systemic and coordinated vision of policies to build a future of

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<sup>207</sup> BES is the indicator for a fair and sustainable welfare developed by ISTAT and CNEL and with the Budget Law n.163/2016, approved on July 28, 2016, it entered for the first time in the State Budget to evaluate the effect of public policies on some fundamental social dimensions. Retrieved at <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/224669>

<sup>208</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>209</sup> APPS is a project developed by Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei (FEEM) to contribute to the worldwide research community working on the assessment of historical and future trends of SDGs Indicators as well as on the measurement of the effects of policies designed to improve sustainability all over the World. It also provides synthetic indices by sustainability dimension and a multi-dimensional index.

Retrieved at <http://www.iccgov.org/en/assessments-projections-and-policies-for-sustainable-development-goals/>

fair and sustainable. From an institutional point of view, the current division of tasks among the ministries is not aligned with the logic of the 2030 Agenda and lacks effective coordination that evaluates the guidelines of sectoral policies in the light of the paradigm of Sustainable Development. The division of tasks between state, regional and local bodies is very far from optimal and makes it impossible to ensure an integrated and long-term vision required by 2030 Agenda.

According to professor Enrico Giovannini, founder and spokesperson of the ASviS, to date it is essential to respect the interdependence of the sectors to accommodate the challenge of the complexity of the 2030 Agenda. From an analytical point of view, the ASviS 2018 report proposes an integrated interpretation of the condition of our country and presents different scenarios calculated in 2030 using a model of general economic equilibrium that indicates how “business as usual” policies are not able to significantly improve the wellbeing, equity and sustainability of the Italian State-System, which could even worsen its position with respect to its European partners. On the contrary, the adoption of a systemic set of economic, social and environmental policies would significantly improve the overall performance of the country. Starting from the new legislature, it is essential to accelerate cultural change in the ruling classes and in the public opinion in favour of a systemic vision of development capable of ensuring equity and sustainability of wellbeing, exploiting the synergies that the favourable interaction of sectoral policies can generate.

In particular, among the possible interventions, it should be noted that in the coming months, i.e. within the current legislature, it is necessary to complete, on the one hand, the approval process of laws on the reduction of land consumption, the right to water, fair trade and the implementation measures for the reform of the Third Sector and, on the other, to reform strategies concerning the energy issue, the circular economy, the fight against climate change, which are crucial for the future of the country

As regards the fight against inequality, the issue of gender equality becomes crucial for the new legislature and the establishment of a permanent body for the coordination with civil society of policies in favour of gender equality at the Presidency of the Council represents a necessary change.

Beyond the numerous proposals for concrete actions in economic, social and environmental matters, in terms of governance, three years after the signing of the commitment to Sustainable Development, ASviS reiterates the urgency of introducing Sustainable Development between the fundamental principles of our Constitution and to activate the

“Commissione nazionale per lo sviluppo sostenibile” foreseen by the Presidency of the Council Directive of March 16th.

It is necessary to intervene on the forthcoming Budget Law 2019 which must understand the enormous economic opportunities offered by the transition to Sustainable Development and must be provided with a report on the expected impact on the 12 indicators of BES index which entered in financial planning to accelerate the achievement of the 22 targets that must be achieved by 2020. Furthermore, the “Comitato Interministeriale per la Programmazione Economica (CIPE)” should be transformed into the “Comitato Interministeriale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile” and provide the country with further systemic tools, such as adopting a National Urban Agenda based on SDGs, which is proposed as the joint of the “Strategia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile” for metropolitan areas. Dealing with the “Strategia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile”, also in quantitative terms, is essential in order to make its governance operational.

In the sphere of promotion policies, business-oriented actions, including financial ones, must be emphasized and they should absorb the culture of sustainability. In this regard, an objective is to widen the group of companies subject to the obligation of non-financial reporting, an instrument which is now essential to access the growing flow of investments activated by “sustainable finance”. Transparency towards stakeholders and the reporting of activities and business results based on the contribution provided to the achievement of the SDGs must become common practice for all medium-sized and large public administrations, for which it is appropriate to prepare guidelines to apply environmental and organizational standards that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

Given the above, the challenge of the 2030 Agenda is profoundly rethinking the way we conceive policies and it is reorganizing a path of Sustainable Development from all points of view. In this sense, 2019 is more than ever a crucial year for this issue because the EU is called to elect the European Parliament, the new Commission and the European Council, which will have to indicate together the future direction of the EU, poised between greater political integration, the maintenance of the *status quo* or even the fall-back on issues closely linked to the functioning of the financial markets. It is worth nothing that Europe is so far the leading exponent of Sustainable Development and has played a key role in the negotiation of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreements and many other international conventions on the various aspects of Sustainable Development. The indicators currently available show that European countries are on average more advanced in achieving the SDGs than in the rest of the world. However, the EU is lagging behind on the definition of concrete plans for the ecological transition, the

education of the new generations and the circular economy. The answer to this incompleteness lies in the full insertion of the 2030 Agenda into European policies and in the program that will replace the “Europe 2020” Strategy. In order to implement the 2030 Agenda, a clear indication of the current distribution of tasks between Union and member states is crucial, which dates back to the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, when the economic, technological, social and environmental changes underway had not yet the magnitude we are experiencing nowadays. Added to this are the evident difficulties in managing phenomena such as immigration and security and the record number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion (about 120 million) which demonstrate the evident unsustainability of the current development model, to such an extent that the growing success of the European nationalist movements is causing enormous risks for the identity and the very idea of the Union. It is therefore clear that the fundamental principles of the EU, which have been consolidated over the decades through the multiple treaties of the Community, must be associated with a strategic vision of the future of the Union that can realize the principles established over time<sup>210</sup>.

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<sup>210</sup> *op.cit.*, GIOVANNINI E., 2018, *L’Utopia Sostenibile*, Laterza.

## Conclusions

The evolution of sustainability thinking has brought environmental issues to the centre of ethical reflection on relations between humanity and nature. Given the global scale of the human impact on the environment, the connection with social justice issues is increasingly evident. The turning point in the culture and in the collective awareness marked by the *The Limits to Growth* report has constituted a truly revolutionary transition including in the international debate the perception that, despite the impressive development of technology we must deal with the finite dimension of natural resources and that the infinite growth of wealth could prove incompatible with the insufficient amount of natural resources.

It was 1987 when *Our Common Future* was published, the final report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), set up under the UN in 1983 and chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report is still considered a cornerstone of reflection on environmental issues and their connection with socio-economic imbalances. This was followed by all subsequent global documents and conferences including the 2030 UN Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in September 2015. The Brundtland Report contains the most commonly used and most accredited definition of Sustainable Development: “*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. It was a revolutionary document that enunciated the link between environment and development, the interdependence between nations in the management of environment, the extension of the concept of development to that of social equity and it identified three main obstacles on the road to achieving a development compatible with the defense of the environment; the almost absolute dependence on fossil fuels as an energy source for human activities, the irrepressible demographic explosion of the countries of the South of the world; the inadequacy of the institutional framework to coordinate and impose global economic, technological and ecological choices essential for the pursuit of effective Sustainable Development.

30 years later - after many analyzes, discussions, commitments and criticisms - we can say that sustainability has entered our vocabulary, the reflection on sustainable development has progressively established itself at the political, scientific, legal and cultural levels, up to become the paradigm of reference for the people and planet of the XXI century with the approval by the United Nations of the Sustainable Development Goals.



However, as seen in the above, it cannot be said that a practical application to such theoretical paradigmatic change has been given. Despite some progress, the economic and social system is still far from being considered sustainable. A balanced relationship between humanity and the environment in which it lives is not yet within reach.

Following the evolution of the debate on Sustainable Development, it is essential to grasp the integrated and multidimensional approach of sustainability in its anthropocentric perspective, which challenges environmental ethics as an expression of a fundamental responsibility towards future generations. The affirmation of a temporal-space dimension of sustainability poses the question of safeguarding and careful and responsible use of nature as a criterion of justice referring to a fair access and an equal distribution of the resources of the entire planet Earth for all (intragenerational dimension) and for future generations (intergenerational dimension).

In this perspective, reflecting on the urgency of sustainability means recognizing the natural limits of our planet as a qualifier for Sustainable Development, which places constraints on the consumption of resources compared to their own capacity for regeneration, at the rate of use of renewables, pollution and waste production compared to the assimilation capacity of natural systems. In this sense, Sustainable Development overcomes the traditional anthropocentric vision, placing, from an economic and social point of view, human development within the limits set by the Earth's ecosystem.

In a biocentric vision, the natural limits of our planet should not however be understood as a renunciation of seeking an improvement in human conditions and its relations with the environment, but rather as an opportunity for man to achieve his activity of social progress through a greater efficiency in the use of resources and a reduction in consumption and pollution, placing at the centre of its action the moral primacy of nature and denying any form of hierarchy of man himself on other living beings as a foundation of their ethical and social norms. This interpretation of the Sustainable Development approach allows us to understand with ever greater precision how human societies are inserted and interact with ecosystem dynamics. Sustainable development proposes an integrated reading of the different dimensions on which human society is articulated, such as social, economic and environmental, capturing the close interweaving of relations between social systems and natural systems.

It is clear that the environment, seen in its entirety, concerns the relationships of men with other living beings and therefore this relationship cannot be subjected to an imposing stress due to the affirmation of man's dominion over nature according to an erroneous anthropocentric vision of life that exploits industrial production and the intensive use of energy

as activities necessary for the improvement of the human condition. This awareness must therefore be immediately translated into concrete actions by all the players involved (governments, institutions, companies, financial operators, organizations, associations, citizens) at all social levels to avoid that sustainability remains just a slogan.

The pursuit of a Sustainable Development is based on an ever more timely and growing collection and processing of knowledge and scientific data to understand the impacts on nature, as well as on an increasingly precise reading of the interrelations between natural and social systems. To date, new problems and threats have emerged but nevertheless new scientific and technological acquisitions have brought hopes for the future and greater knowledge. We have acquired the awareness that unfortunately it is difficult to change economic-social systems and lifestyles, but also that the results achieved are always provisional and unstable. On these grounds, with a view to Sustainable Development, the environmental question can no longer be relegated to the problem of pollution and to the exploitation of environmental resources, but it takes on a global dimension that involves, albeit in a different way, all the dimensions of the society. The condition of human life over time is the set of delicate balances that guarantee the maintenance and development of life on the planet, which increasingly depend on the human capacity to reduce the ecological footprint and to seek new balances in the relationship with the natural environment and its resources.

The paradigm of Sustainable Development, therefore, has helped to understand for the first time to the governments of the world that, at this point in human history, the need to integrate environmental aspects in the discussions on social development. It is essential to make an active transformation of the environment on a global scale rather than to limit the action to adapt to the environment.

Sustainable Development is today one of the key points of EU policies. The approach and models adopted are probably the right ones to address economic, social and environmental challenges. The wide European range of environmental legislation is the most complete set of environmental standards in the world. About 550 directives, regulations and decisions are improving living conditions, raising standards and decreasing pollutant emissions, with benefits for citizens and the environment.

The seed of change was planted in the 70s, when the first ministers of the Environment were created, and the first EU Environmental Action Program was launched. The 1987 Brundtland Report then made the first major attempt to present a way out of the modern ecological crisis that 25 years earlier, in 1962, had found a dramatic voice in Rachel Carson with his work "Silent Spring" and a first quantitative analysis 10 years later with the Meadows

Report "The Limits to Growth". Rachel Carson, as well as the group of scholars of the Club of Rome, trusted in the conviction of the elites and world public opinion in a change of conscience that would have been the propelling force of the transformation towards a Sustainable Development.

Since 1992, the concept of Sustainable Development and climate change have received official recognition from the United Nations in the context of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Since then, the awareness of the need to manage environmental issues on a global scale and the need to eliminate poverty was identified as a prerequisite for the process of Sustainable Development, which, together with the climate change issue have never stopped interacting and influencing each other in the social development discourse. Climate changes started to modify the main natural and human life conditions and therefore the conditions for social and economic development. The need to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations would have allowed economic development to proceed in a sustainable way to make national and regional development paths less impactful. In particular, developing countries referred to the concept of Sustainable Development to highlight the gravity and increasing frequency of the impacts of climate changes affecting the poorest populations.

The experience of the UNFCCC became increasingly a point of reference for the negotiation processes during the UN Conferences and to understand the importance of the balance between human activity and the environment, as well as the severity of the impact of the socio-economic model of infinite growth on the natural world. Pursuing sustainable development became impossible without addressing the issues related to the increase in global temperature.

At the European level, the real turning point came in 1999, with the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty. The environmental protection became a constitutional principle of the EU, sanctioning its transversal integration into Community policies and activities, with the aim of promoting Sustainable Development. Two years later, during the Göteborg Summit in June 2001, EU leaders launched the first real EU strategy on Sustainable Development. The Göteborg Declaration had the merit of definitively inserting the environmental dimension as third pillar of the European policy into the process of Sustainable Development, that was to be added the first two pillars, social and economic, defined by the Lisbon Strategy. An ambitious call for a new approach to decision-making process for ensuring that EU economic, social and environmental policies were mutually reinforced. However, the failure of the Hague Conference testified a sign of the inability of governments to take on a problem with great economic implications, both for present generations and for future ones and more generally,

there was a possible contradiction between the main objective of the Lisbon Strategy, that was to achieve an EU economic growth as strong as possible, and pursue Sustainable Development, which was given a marginal and imprecise qualification regarding the mechanisms of formation of political guidelines for its implementation.

In most developing countries, it was difficult to reconcile the need to reduce poverty without harming the environment. Although underdevelopment was one of the main causes of environmental damage, the environmental protection was considered a secondary end to the overcoming of social and economic inequalities. Therefore, it was not coincidence that in Johannesburg particular attention will be given to the issue of poverty reduction, where unfortunately, official documents and declarations signed, would remain empty proclamation of intent. Despite the fact that an incontrovertible cause of failure was the lack of a single approach between the financial, commercial, investment, technology and policy systems, based on short-term rather than long-term considerations, Johannesburg Conference aroused a sensitization of the world public opinion. The relaunching of the Lisbon Strategy was envisaged as a crucial political pattern in the construction of a European model of development and cohesion, which proposed the definitive integration between the Lisbon Strategy and the Göteborg Strategy.

The Lisbon Treaty innovated the process of community integration, providing greater opportunities for the implementation of the new Strategy which will be further renamed in 2010 with the name “Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” that would have outline a framework of the social market economy for the next decade, focusing on three priority areas: intelligent growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth.

Climate change was beginning to represent the biggest challenge of our time and its negative and irreversible impacts threatened the ability of all countries to achieve Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, at Rio+20 Conference, faded the last attempts to establish a sustainable economy based on a green model, due to the opposition of China and other poor and developing countries, resulting in a document that contained no concrete commitment. At the same time, a parallel process took place in the negotiations on the fight against climate change: Copenhagen COP15 failed in an attempt to replace the Kyoto Protocol - which had represented the first example of a legally binding global treaty in history - with a new legally binding treaty for the lowering of greenhouse emissions. If on the one hand economic growth, reinforced by globalization, had allowed several countries to reduce the level of poverty, others had witnessed a deterioration in socio-economic conditions, with an increase in income inequality and an incalculable environmental damage. The new post-Rio+20 and post-

Copenhagen negotiations have set a different path based on goals and not on the means, therefore respectful of the differences between economies and levels of development, setting equal targets for all and leaving the individual countries to do their best but with the utmost transparency and any possible uniformity in making the results known. In a symmetrical way, the two processes had a common outcome in 2015; climate change has indeed played a crucial role in the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development, a blueprint approved by the UN on 25 September 2015, together with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), articulated in 169 targets and 240 indicators, to be reached by 2030. Agenda 2030 propose goals and challenges for all world governments in an indistinct way and in the slot of goal 13 of such Agenda was inserted in December 2015 the result of the Global Climate Agreement in Paris, which set the goal at the turn of the century to contain the increase in global average temperature below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels.

The historic global political Paris Agreement of 2015 represents an important watershed because it has sanctioned the definitive defeat of those who did not recognize climate change as real, giving a sense of urgency to the need to find a global response to Sustainable Development and climate change even if it does not provide for a legally binding value. Although the milestone reached, the continuous hypothesis of exit from the Paris agreement feared by the US president Trump and the recent election of Jair Bolsonaro on one side and, to some extent, the growing success of the European nationalist movements which could cause enormous risks for the identity and the very idea of the Union, are likely to jeopardizing those small but significant steps forward made on the political level.

Nowadays, the threats of the Anthropocene require complex answers, which in this vision can only arise from the strengthening of world governance. However, for many countries in the world, the link between the actions needed to tackle climate change and development priorities, including social and economic development and poverty eradication is a limitation. On the contrary, the EU has come a long way in terms of Sustainable Development, expressing a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, incorporating Sustainable Development into EU policies to ensure that economic, social and environmental challenges are jointly addressed. An approach based on the implementation of the SDGs and the UN 2030 Agenda as a guiding principle in a shared commitment that requires the contribution and cooperation of member states governments and civil society. This awareness was a reason why the EU was instrumental in defining the global 2030 Agenda despite the significant critical issues that could be observed in it, which demonstrate the incompatibility between GDP-based economic growth

and the urgent need to take concrete measures to combat climate change and protect the environment.

Given the above, on a global level, the path of Sustainable Development started thirty years ago with the Brundtland Report, does not yet have a sufficient step to achieve the Goals set for 2030. Natural resources are running out and biodiversity is losing at an alarming rate. Air pollution due to the high concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, urbanization and climate change remain a threat. Inequalities have increased everywhere, between countries and even within richer countries. The fight against extreme poverty is yielding results, but the general picture shows increasing inequity in the distribution of wealth and serious problems for employment, gender equality and the rights of the weakest.

In conclusion, humanity today faces an epoch-making challenge and these issues should be at the forefront of international and national political agendas as the task we are facing is not so much environmental as it is political since environmental problems do not respect national borders. Considering future risks, the immediate direction to take is that for which social, economic, environmental and institutional equity and social sustainability, become pillars to construct a new paradigm of human development that support the convergence and the integration of economic development, social development and environmental protection. These three dimensions cannot be considered independently as they are inseparable and co-essential to a path of overall sustainability.

The importance of concrete political choices within a universal reference framework for Sustainable Development is crucial and it is no longer sufficient to limit the action to *façade* operations given the risks indicated by the numerous scientific studies. There is a growing amount of evidence that it is impossible to think of continuing with scenarios like *business as usual*, but a profound change is required by all, institutions, companies and civil society that must be protagonists of change. The transition to the principles and practices of Sustainable Development is decisive for a sustainable human future as well as recognizing the limits of the planet we come from, on which we depend and without which we can not live, in the urgency of reversing the course of our patterns of infinite growth. To believe that there is no alternative is what reassures us but at the same time condemns us. We can provide a vision of a better future, the climate crisis might just give us an opportunity to create a healthier and more equitable world.



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**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ON THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN  
BY THE EU**

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## Introduction

Imagine having three options in front of you. On the left there is social progress. At the centre the environmental protection. On the right, economic development. It is true, each option chosen individually would lead to positive results for the future that we would like if we imagined a better world.

However, each of these three options, if taken alone and to the detriment of the others, also has strong limits. Therefore, if we want to look at a future that contemplates all three options available, we must absolutely try to reach a synthesis between the three options in the field. It is necessary to abandon the logic according to which the environment, economy and society are not inextricably dependent on each other and understand that our planet has finite natural resources and its carrying capacity is limited. Nowadays, almost all scientists believe that the current model of economic growth based on consumerism and short-term profit generates serious environmental risks and social problems. In this context, it is therefore necessary to rethink a new development project that ensures a more extensive and inclusive well-being. In this regard, the concept of Sustainable Development would seem to be the only model able to summarize the three options available to us and translate the needs of our time into an alternative socio-economic paradigm that can ensure well-being for all and resilience for the biosphere towards the impacts of human activities and a consumption of natural resources compatible with their long-term availability, in order to preserve the planet for present and future generations. The awareness of the urgent need for an alternative vision of development has become essential to face an unprecedented challenge in the history of humanity in guaranteeing the current 7.6 billion human beings and - the 9 billion expected in 2050 - the natural resources from depends on our existence, the quality of life and our well-being.

The growing attention to the urgency of pursuing a Sustainable Development has launched a profound revision process in the last decade, which concerns the political agendas of all the governments of the world. It is an awareness in the institutional sphere in order to reformulate the organizational models and create new tools to approach the problems of the whole current development model within the space of construction of global governance.

This work originated from the internship experience held in Brussels at the EASME (Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises), an agency of the European Commission. Through the LUISS Guido Carli University, I had the opportunity to catapult myself into the European dimension of planning in terms of Sustainable Development. In the Agency of the European Commission, alternating a horizontal research work, with a vertical work of analysis and data processing, I was able to acquire knowledge related to the industrial energy efficiency program. In addition, I was able to concretely observe the parameters for evaluating the efficiency and validity of project funding under the Life and H2020 programs. This experience has allowed me to understand closely how the European

Union is facing the challenges of the globalization process and in particular the energy and environmental issues, essential to understand its commitment to pursuing Community policies and initiatives for Sustainable Development.

The imperative of sustainability has led the EU to develop a set of tools and indicators to monitor progress. In fact, the dissemination of indicators, methods and models is essential to support decision-making processes in environmental matters and economic development.

In this sense, over the past few years, the EU has developed considerable action demonstrating its willingness to take up the challenge of sustainability, an objective that can no longer be avoided and has become a reference point in which to incite the policies and initiatives of the different government levels.

In this scenario, this work represents an attempt to retrace, from a historical perspective, the critical aspects of the evolution of the international debate on the concept of sustainable development, analyzing the path taken by the EU in pursuing Sustainable Development. With this in mind, through the historical reconstruction of the main world conferences concerning the theme of Sustainable Development and the criticality of the many social, economic and environmental aspects related to it, emphasis is given to understanding the progress of the European Union's contribution in order to pursue Sustainable Development.

It is worth recalling that the concept of Sustainable Development is introduced for the first time in the Our Common Future Report (known as the Brundtland Report), issued in 1987 by the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The document defines as sustainable that “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs<sup>1</sup>*”. The notion of sustainability, outlined in the Report, was linked to the compatibility between the development of economic activities and environmental protection, introducing the question of intergenerational and intragenerational fairness. The principle of Sustainable Development foresaw that the richer countries would adopt productive processes and lifestyles compatible with the capacity of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities and that developing countries could grow in demographic and economic terms at rates compatible with the ecosystem. This definition of Sustainable Development, from that moment on, set in motion a social agenda that would consider relations between development and the environment on a global scale, paying particular attention to the political and economic aspects. The principle of Sustainable Development has been associated with topics such as population, food security, species extinctions, energy, industry, the urban question, which represent the collective challenges. These themes could be addressed through common efforts, whose main working directions concerned the management of international common goods, the connection between peace, security, development and the environment, the need for institutional and social changes.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development A/42/427 - *Our Common Future*. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/milestones/wced>

Prior to the Brundtland Report, in the seventies the debate began on environmental issues. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, which, together with the Brundtland Report will be described in the second chapter of this work, marked a turning point in the development of international environmental policy. The Declaration approved by the Heads of the 110 participating delegations highlighted the importance of the defense and improvement of the environment which have become an imperative aim for humanity to be pursued together with the fundamental goals of peace and of world economic and social development. This is the first international document that recognizes the protection of the environment as one of the priority objectives for humanity and represents a point of reference for the adoption of environmental protection measures, in particular those related to the climate and the definition of the stages in Sustainable Development. The 26 principles contained in this first international document focus on social well-being and protection of the environmental heritage, according to a criterion of fair distribution of resources, also in the face of future generations. Following the Conference, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was established, which is one of the most important references for Sustainable Development at world level, together with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUNC).

The historical perspective of the concept of Sustainable Development will notice a crucial *momentum* at the end of the last century, during the Earth Summit, the first world conference of Heads of State on the environment. Such historic perspective is complemented by the third chapter that offers an analysis of the critical aspects of sustainability starting from the first Rio conference and in parallel, the measures adopted in Europe in relation to the evolution of the themes concerning Sustainable Development are observed. Indeed, in 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, called Earth Summit, consolidated the concept of Sustainable Development. The two fundamental elements around which reflection was articulated are the environment, as an essential dimension of economic development, and intergenerational responsibility in the use of human resources. The Conference was attended by 172 Governments, 108 Heads of State and 2,400 representatives of non-governmental organizations that endorse Agenda 21, a global action program to be undertaken at national and local level in all sectors of Sustainable Development. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development focused on the environment, on the economy and on society and, reaffirming the rules established at the Stockholm Conference, enunciated the 27 principles on the rights and responsibilities of nations in the pursuit of development and human well-being. Furthermore, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was approved with the aim of preserving biodiversity and the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNCCC) aimed at stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions at a level that would not endanger the global climate. In order to ensure effective follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and

Development, the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) was established by the UN, subsequently replaced by a High-level Political Forum nominated in 2012 by the United Nations Development Conference Sustainable. The progress achieved five years after the definition of Agenda 21 was evaluated in 1997 during the Earth Summit+5. On this occasion the growing interest in the multiple aspects related to Sustainable Development was emphasized, but at the same time the persistence of disparities in the achievement of the established objectives was highlighted. This delay is attributable to the phenomenon of globalization, which has led to an imbalance between countries in which poverty levels have been reduced and others in which there has been a deterioration in socio-economic conditions. Indigence, low levels of social development, inadequate infrastructure, lack of capital have prevented these poor countries from planning concrete actions to pursue Sustainable Development. In this context, the need arose for international support to operate in a spirit of extended partnership, in order to integrate sustainability into all social aspects and make it inclusive for every level of governance. This requirement is confirmed by the Millennium Summit, held in New York in 2000, in which the Heads of State and Government sign the Millennium Declaration. Among the fundamental values enshrined in the document, was mentioned the respect for nature, which provides for prudence in the management of all living species and natural resources; unsustainable production and development models must be transformed in accordance with the precepts of Sustainable Development. To this end, eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established, which committed the 193 signatory states to achieve them by 2015, including eradicating extreme poverty and world hunger; to make primary education universal, to promote gender equality and women's autonomy; reduce infant mortality and maternal mortality; fight AIDS, malaria and other diseases; guarantee environmental sustainability; form a global partnership for development. In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, reiterated the attention to the new challenges to be faced in order to achieve Sustainable Development: a model of development that would combine economic, social and environmental aspects and able to ensure a fairer and more prosperous society respecting future generations. At the centre of the reflection there were the relevant issues highlighted during the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit and the state of implementation of the decisions taken. The result was a Plan of Implementation, signed by the 191 participating States, which identifies key issues for the next decade. The final document continued to focus on the eradication of poverty, on changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, on the protection and management of natural resources.

The fourth chapter traces the most recent phase of the advancement of the world's commitment to Sustainable Development, particularly the European Union.

Twenty years after the Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), Rio+20, was held again in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 with the aim of renewing the political commitment to Sustainable Development, verifying the state of implementation of the international responsibilities assumed in the last two decades and channel the efforts of governments

and civil society towards common objectives and new challenges to face. The Conference focused attention on two aspects. The first concerned the need to move towards a green economy to reduce the risks associated with global threats, among which the most alarming was that of climate change, which were the cause and consequences of other worrying phenomena including the loss of biodiversity, desertification and depletion of natural resources. In order to promote social and economic well-being it was necessary to create an institutional framework for Sustainable Development, a global governance capable of including all institutions and actors responsible for developing, monitoring and implementing policies.

In this context of global action for the definition of an international institutional framework, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted in September 2015 the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which are outlined at global level the guidelines of activities for the coming years that each state is strongly obliged to consider in the formulation of its internal policies. In the same year, in line with the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Climate Agreement was also adopted. The implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that constitute the 2030 Agenda is addressed to different areas of social, economic and environmental development that must be considered in an integrated vision. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development still represents the United Nations global action plan for people, the planet and prosperity, with the aim of achieving a sustainable transformation of society, economy and environment for 2030.

In this regard, the last chapter of this work is dedicated to figure out the current situation of our country – as an EU member state – with respect to the SDGs indicated by 2030 Agenda by means of the ASviS Report 2018 which perfectly portrays the situation of Italy with respect to the SDGs.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Sustainable Development in time and space

### *I. Preliminary considerations*

When we look at the history of humanity, the relationship between the two most complex systems on Earth, human society and nature, is omnipresent. Human beings today are at a critical point in history, the era of dependence on fossil fuels has triggered a sequence of events that has led to today's environmental crisis. Nature seen as an inexhaustible resource has led to the conception that is at the basis of the distorted idea of progress we have believed for centuries and which results in unlimited growth and expansion. Maximizing GDP, continues to be the main objective of economic policies, neglecting all distributional considerations and other dimensions of well-being and quality of life. An unsustainable environmental model, which assumes that it has sufficient material resources to fuel an infinite growth in consumption on which the satisfaction of human needs depends. The idea of development in which we have believed and on which we have founded our socio-economic paradigm during the last centuries, has favoured the growth of economic activities, but also maintained areas of unemployment and large social groups of poverty that led to an increasing inequality and strong social unease, not counting the environmental impact and the catastrophic consequences that have ensued for ecosystems, for living organisms and in terms of climate change. Human development therefore cannot be traced back to the sole economic dimension. The current increasingly globalized production and consumption models will have less and less sustainable environmental and social impact and unfortunately, time is not an irrelevant variable for the dynamics underway. Numerically, the unsustainability of the current socio-economic system can be summarized in some data. In the world almost 800 million people are in a condition of extreme poverty and a similar number of people is undernourished, that 60 million people live in a condition of slavery, which over 400 million were affected by natural disasters in 2016, that 1% of the population owns 50% of the world's wealth, which 700 million people do not have access to clean water<sup>2</sup>. For these reasons, the search for solutions to create a sustainable future is the greatest challenge of our time. Needless to hide: we are facing an epochal passage in our history and considering future risks, the immediate direction to take is that for which social, economic, environmental and institutional equity and social sustainability, become a practice to construct a new paradigm of human development that respects planetary limits. Sustainable development, in this sense, is the only paradigm that sees in the conversion of the current model of production, consumption and organization of society the best opportunity to avoid the risks of the collapse of the current socio-economic system, which are been recognized as real by the political leaders

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<sup>2</sup> GIOVANNINI E., *L'Utopia Sostenibile*, 2018, Laterza, pag. vi.



of the UN countries. The task we are facing is not so much environmental as it is political since environmental problems do not respect national borders.

In this respect, the desire to direct the course of events towards a new direction seems to have been launched on 25 September 2015, the day in which the Heads of State and Government of the 193 countries that are part of the UN have recognized the unsustainability of the current development model, and by signing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, have officially adopted the SDGs. The 17 SDGs, proposed with the aim of expressing the collective imagination and representing the reference framework of development policies in the coming years, are an operational translation of the idea of human development. The need for a universal reference framework for Sustainable Development, calls for a demanding horizon based on the convergence and integration of economic development, social development and environmental protection<sup>3</sup>. These three dimensions cannot be considered independently or pursued through objectives that are unrelated to each other, as they are inseparable and co-essential to a path of overall sustainability. In other words, it is necessary to get out of the illusion that it is possible to solve the problems of defining a model of production, consumption and exchange (economic sustainability), without worrying about whether this comes into collision with the biophysical limits of the Earth (environmental sustainability) or if a significant proportion of the world's population remains excluded from the enjoyment of the benefits of economic development (social sustainability). To believe that it is impossible to pursue an alternative to the current unsustainable growth model while remaining indifferent to grasping the greatest challenge of our age is what reassures us but at the same time condemns us. We can provide a vision of a better future, the climate crisis might just give us an opportunity to create a healthier and more equitable world.

## II. *Origins and definition*

Although this idea of development has only spread in recent years, the roots of Sustainable Development understood as a concern for the protection of natural resources, go back to less recent times. At the end of the eighteenth century, exactly in 1795, Georg Ludwig Hartig, redeemed concretely in the work *Anweisung zur Taxation der Forste oder zur Bestimmung des Holzertrags der Wälder...etc*<sup>4</sup>, what he had learned in the course of his university studies concerning the cutting of trees that should have conformed to the growth rate and had to taking into account also the needs of future generations. Even if not formalized, this notion appears to be the first definition of sustainable development. Besides, during the French Revolution, the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* will be elaborated, containing a list of fundamental rights of the individual and of the citizen, in which these rights were defined <<*droits naturels, inaliénables et sacrés*<sup>5</sup>>>. Over the decades, the perpetual attempt to propose

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<sup>3</sup> DREXHAGE J., MURPHY D., *Sustainable Development: From Brundtland to Rio 2012*, United Nations, New York, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> HARTIG G.L., *Anweisung zur Taxation der Forste oder zur Bestimmung des Holzertrags der Wälder...etc.*, Gießen, 1795.

<sup>5</sup> *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*. Retrieved at <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/le-bloc-de-constitutionnalite/declaration-des-droits-de-l-homme-et-du-citoyen-de-1789>

alternative economic development models and to construct a general theory aimed at making economic processes compatible with environmental balances has found its paradigm in Sustainable Development, which has thus become a key concept of modern policies.

An important first consequence of the introduction of the concept of Sustainable Development is to have clarified the terminological difference between 'growth' and 'development' that have substantially different economic meanings. Synthetically, growth means in fact the increase, usually measured on a quantitative basis, of gross domestic product (GDP) or other macroeconomic aggregates. Development, on the other hand, is not intended as a simple quantitative growth, but as an improvement in the quality of life. The development must therefore be seen as the result of various components, not only the quantitative ones related to the composition, production and distribution of resources, but also those related to social and environmental aspects<sup>6</sup>. The clarification of this fundamental terminological difference refers to the idea that Sustainable Development presupposes the maintenance over time of existing conditions and the ability to guarantee a future without producing degradation. The meaning of Sustainable Development should therefore be to improve the quality of life or well-being in a lasting way over time. The main emphasis of the idea of development is to highlight the need for a potential change in the vision of the relationship between economic activity and the natural world, replacing the economic model of quantitative expansion (growth) with that of qualitative improvement (development) as a key to future progress<sup>7</sup>.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The fundamental stages at the International level: A Long Road to Sustainable Development**

#### *I. The 1972 Stockholm Conference*

However, up until the 1960s, the perception of environmental problems caused by human activity of production and consumption was not to most of the population and the political class but was limited almost exclusively to scientists and scholars. The conclusions of the MIT study in Boston will be published in 1972, in a report entitled *The Limits to Growth* that will constitute a truly revolutionary transition, destined to become a watershed between the era of absolute ignorance and that of a first search for solutions. The study took into account several interacting factors: population growth, industrial capital, food production, pollution and consumption of natural resources, marking a turning point in the culture and in the collective awareness, including in the international debate the perception that we must deal with the finite dimension of natural resources and that the infinite growth of wealth

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<sup>6</sup> *op.cit.*, GIOVANNINI E., 2018, *L'Utopia Sostenibile*, Laterza, pp.30-31

<sup>7</sup> DAILY B.F., HUANG S., (2001) *Achieving sustainability through attention to human resource factors in environmental management*, International Journal of Operations & Production Management, Vol. 21 Issue: 12, pp.1539-1552.

could prove incompatible with the insufficient amount of natural resources, despite the impressive development of technology<sup>8</sup>. However, the treaties and international conventions concerning environment that followed one another until the end of the 1960s were mainly directed to regulate certain particular sectors from an economic point of view. Sustainable development therefore found its formal statement at the Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm between 5 and 16 June 1972<sup>9</sup>. 113 representatives of governments met to address the problem of environmental degradation and its consequences for the future of the planet, formulating the Environmental Action Program (EAP) and a Declaration consisting of a preamble of 7 points and 26 principles on rights and responsibilities of man in relation to the environment. The EAP called for the achievement of objectives through three different policies such as the assessment of the global environment, environmental management and support measures. In the document it was established that the States' economic development plans should have taken particular account of this report and encouraged the adoption of coordinated and integrated measures. The main purpose of the States was to make the care and protection of the environment a priority and a commitment for the whole international community. In fact, in previous years, due to the profound differences and above all the different economic objectives between industrialized countries on the one hand, committed to increase their industrial development, and on the other hand, developing countries, where environmental protection was considered a secondary end to the overcoming of social and economic inequalities, the environmental problem had never been effectively addressed by the international community. The Stockholm Summit was the first step towards creating a global environmental awareness and was considered a milestone in the development of environmental protection policies<sup>10</sup>. On 31 October 1972, at the European summit in Paris between the Heads of State and Government, the countries of the European Community, under pressure from the German delegation and with the agreement of the three countries about to enter it (Denmark, Great Britain and Ireland), they decided to start a common environmental policy declaring that the economic expansion envisaged by art. 2 of the EEC Treaty should therefore have been implemented with an improvement in the quality of life. Therefore, the Stockholm Conference had the merit of paving the way for the launch of EU environmental policy. In fact, in 1973 the EEC established the first community EAP (1973-1976) representing a general framework for member states but not directly legally binding, while the Environmental Commission was established within the European Parliament. Since then, more than 200 community legislative provisions have come into force on the subject within the European Community. Its main objective was that of preventive action aimed at eliminating possible barriers to the construction of the free market produced by different national environmental laws and to prevent regulatory differences between the various member countries that could give competitive advantages to one state instead of another. In this

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<sup>8</sup> Worldwatch Institute, *E' ancora possibile la sostenibilità?*, Edition Ambiente, Milano, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> P. BIRNE, A. BOYLE, C. REDGWELL, *International Law & the Environment*, Oxford, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> SOHN L.B., *The Stockholm Declaration on Human Environment*, Harvard International Law Journal, Vol. 14 N.3, 1973.

situation, therefore, the Community environmental policies played an accessory role, without their recognized autonomy, both from a formal and an operational point of view. The second EAP (1977-1981) focused more on prevention, scientific research in the environmental field, international cooperation and between European countries and on the study of an Environmental Impact Assessment system (EIA) that became the object of Directive 337 1985, subsequently amended. The EIA and the third EAP (1982-1986) became the reference point of Community policy.

## II. *The establishment of UNEP and the 1987 Brundtland Report*

Starting from the 80s, attention to issues directly related to the protection of the environment has gradually been extended to the social implications of the environmental issue, bringing out ever more clearly the contradictions inherent in a model of development attentive only to the purely economic implications. The eighties saw the birth of several green parties in Europe that elected their representatives to the European Parliament since 1984, while at the same time the number of environmentalist and ecological associations and movements (in particular the WWF, the Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace) experienced an unprecedented and impetuous growth. In 1980, in Nairobi, the UNEP, together with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), published a document called *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*<sup>11</sup>. It is the first official international document that bears the concept of Sustainable Development in its title. The document explains how the saving of natural resources is the basis of a model of sustainable human development, which must represent an absolute priority for all countries in the world and gives concrete solutions to implement this model. Since the 80s, directives and regulations became important instruments of impetus to stimulate significant and specific actions of environmental policy in the individual countries, essentially endeavouring to invest a wide range of sectors of intervention. With the third EAP (1982-1986) an effective preventive policy towards the environment began, no longer subordinated solely to the creation of the common market but introduced into other policies, in particular the agricultural, industrial, energy policies and transport to promote environmental policy as the foundation of economic and social development. With the Single European Act (1987) enters into the European Community Treaties Title XX, dedicated to the environment, thus conferring this policy a formal legal basis and at the same time setting three main objectives on the subject: environmental protection, protection of human health, wise use and rational of natural resources. The fourth EAP (1987-1992) attempted to outline a global approach to environmental policies, expanding the areas of intervention to the management. Moreover, fundamental was the publication, in 1987, of the document *Report of the World Commission on Environment and*

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<sup>11</sup> *World conservation strategy: living resource conservation for sustainable development*, 1980. Retrieved at <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/6424>

*Development: Our Common Future*<sup>12</sup> developed by the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) and better known as the Brundtland Report which became a milestone in the progress of the culture of sustainability with the most accredited definition of Sustainable Development mentioned above. It was a revolutionary document that enunciated the link between environment and development, the interdependence between nations in the management of environment, the extension of the concept of development to that of social equity. The concept of Sustainable Development is accompanied by the intention to consider the environment in a holistic way, based on the well-established awareness that the environment knows no borders and its protection requires the coordinated and conscious action of all the countries of the world. The Brundtland Commission statement did not impose absolute limits on economic development, but those imposed by the present state of technological and social organization in the use of environmental resources and the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. This Report identified with great clarity three main obstacles on the road to achieving a development compatible with the defense of the environment. The first was represented by the almost absolute dependence on fossil fuels as an energy source for human activities<sup>13</sup>. This exploitation, besides aggravating the geopolitical imbalances between the North and the South of the planet, was also responsible for phenomena of transnational pollution such as acid rain, the greenhouse effect, the hole in the ozone, etc. According to the WCED, the alternatives able to lead to sustainability, that is the use of renewable energy sources, had not been pursued with due diligence because of the strong economic interests of large multinational companies and governments that control the supply of fossil fuels. A second threat to Sustainable Development had been identified in the irrepressible demographic explosion of the countries of the South of the world, which risked making the size and growth of the population incompatible with the productive capacities of the ecosystem. Therefore, one of the salient aspects of the Brundtland Report was given by the fact that it linked explicitly the ecological and social problems, stating that underdevelopment is one of the main causes of environmental damage. Thus, it was absolutely necessary to help developing countries to implement non-aggressive growth models towards ecosystems, by making transfers of financial resources and technologies from the most advanced countries. The third obstacle identified by the Report was the inadequacy of the institutional framework, as there were no supranational institutions or institutions with the necessary power to coordinate and impose global economic, technological and ecological choices essential for the pursuit of effective Sustainable Development. However, in addition to identifying the main obstacles to achieving a development compatible with environmental protection, the Report aimed to define the terms on which to rethink Sustainable Development. In fact, in order to ensure the satisfaction of the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs, the pillars on which this process should have been built were

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>

<sup>13</sup> KNOX P., AGNEW J., *The Geography of the World Economy*, London, E. Arnold, 1994 (trad. it. Geografia economica, Vol.2., Milano, Angeli, 1996).

economic, social, environmental and institutional and the collapse of one of them would have determined the overall unsustainability of the whole development process. In particular, it should be emphasized that, from an institutional point of view, the aspect of the centrality of 'participation of all', was a condition that should have been supported by the political systems in the decision process, in order to ensure a greater level of democracy in international choices. The main merit of the Report is to have set in motion a process that created the context for most of the sustainability policies and legislative activities on the matter that will proliferate in the following decade, although the definition of Sustainable Development proposed by the Brundtland Commission appeared *“Not immediately usable to measure the sustainability of a development process through statistical indicators. It is a definition that puts on the same level the 'intragenerational' justice, that is the one concerning the relationships between people and peoples belonging to the same generation, and the 'intergenerational' one, which links the different generations among them. It is a definition that goes beyond the simple relationship between economic growth and environmental limits, indicating that there is no more important pillar than the others and that without a balance between the different dimensions the development process tends to surrender, just like the Report to the Club of Rome had demonstrated<sup>14</sup>”*. For this reason, despite the Stockholm Conference represented the adoption of some principles that are the basis of the concept of Sustainable Development and the Brundtland Report defined for the first time this concept, until the beginning of the 90s, the approach to environmental protection was carried out above all through conventions and mainly sectorial treatises that led to poor results. The same policies adopted under UNEP had not produced the desired outcome, as this institution had not received any kind of support from the States. In this sense, the nineties represented the years of becoming aware that a real path towards Sustainable Development and effective protection of the environment could have given positive results only if they had concretely contemplated the economic, environmental, social and institutional aspects of this idea by adopting it internationally, especially in light of the numerous environmental disasters that were taking place in different parts of the world. From this moment on, numerous UN conferences will help develop the notion of sustainability in its various dimensions, from human rights to the status of women, from desertification to social development.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **From Rio'92 to Johannesburg Conference**

#### ***I. The Rio Earth Summit 1992***

Driven by these motivations, the UN General Assembly called in 1992 the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, which took

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<sup>14</sup> *op.cit.*, GIOVANNINI E., 2018, *L'Utopia Sostenibile*, Laterza, pag. 30

place in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil from 3 to 14 June<sup>15</sup>. Within the Conference, the most relevant achievements were The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Forest Principles.

The Earth Summit raised the awareness of the need to manage environmental issues on a global scale and the need to eliminate poverty was identified as a prerequisite for Sustainable Development. The Declaration stated 27 universally applicable principles of political nature, intended to guide international action in accordance with environmental and economic responsibilities. Among these, the most important were the precautionary principle, the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and the polluter pays principle. The second policy document for programming purposes, produced in the context of the Rio Conference, was Agenda 21<sup>16</sup>. It will constitute a long-term general program to be followed as guidelines for Sustainable Development in the 21st century concerning the integration of environmental issues at every institutional and government level, ensuring greater transversality between sectoral policies and the encouragement of public participation. In this regard, the so-called Local Agenda 21<sup>17</sup>, promoted the local partnership to launch strategies for Sustainable Development. However, the approach of the Rio Conference turned out to be unsuccessful in many ways. In fact, the Earth Charter<sup>18</sup> was not adopted and from a practical point of view, the Agenda 21 blueprint, will not have the desired result. The major limitation of the Rio Declaration was represented by the fact that it, like that of Stockholm, was composed of the mere enunciation of principles, which did not result in a binding instrument for States<sup>19</sup>. The European path on the road to sustainability began with the fifth EAP (1993 – 2000)<sup>20</sup>, which called for a change in the behavioural patterns of society by promoting the participation of all sectors, strengthening the spirit of co-responsibility that extends to public administration, businesses and the community, the improvement of information and environmental statistics, support for scientific research and technological development, financial support mechanisms such as LIFE programs, Structural Funds, loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Cohesion Fund, marking a very significant evolutionary phase of environmental policy<sup>21</sup>. Subsequently, entered into force in 1993 the Treaty on European Union (TEU), known as the Maastricht Treaty, which sanctioned the passage of the European Community to the European Union. Within the Treaty, the reference to the concept of sustainability, understood as a form

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<sup>15</sup> UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992.

Retrieved at <http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/enviro.html>

<sup>16</sup> Agenda 21, UNCED, 1992. Retrieved from:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=23&menu=35>

<sup>17</sup> *op.cit.*, ANTICH F., Origine ed evoluzione del diritto internazionale ambientale. Verso una governance globale dell'ambiente: Agenda 21. Retrieved at:

[https://www.ambientediritto.it/dottrina/Diritto%20internazionale%20ambiente/Origine\\_evoluzione\\_diritto\\_internazionale\\_a\\_mbiendale.htm](https://www.ambientediritto.it/dottrina/Diritto%20internazionale%20ambiente/Origine_evoluzione_diritto_internazionale_a_mbiendale.htm)

<sup>18</sup> Retrieved at <http://earthcharter.org/discover/history-of-the-earth-charter/>

<sup>19</sup> VIÑUALES J.E., *The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: A Commentary*, OUP Oxford, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.eea.europa.eu/help/glossary/eea-glossary/fifth-environment-action-programme>

<sup>21</sup> introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in order to help the four countries with the lowest GDP: Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Spain.

of economic development to be pursued, is repeatedly and constantly present<sup>22</sup>. Environmental policy therefore became a recognized structural policy of the EU<sup>23</sup>. With the signing of the Aalborg Charter in 1994, European cities and regions committed themselves to implementing Agenda 21 at the local level, advancing long-term plans for Sustainable development<sup>24</sup>. Two years later, the document produced by the Lisbon Conference was the approval of the "Lisbon Action Plan: from Charter to Action" sanctioned the translation into concrete actions of the principles on sustainability. The European competences aimed at achieving Sustainable Development were then further expanded, with the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam which entered into force in 1999. With this Treaty, environmental protection, had become a constitutional principle of the European Union sanctioning the transversal integration of environmental protection objectives into all EU policies with the ultimate goal of achieving Sustainable Development<sup>25</sup>. With the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol on the reduction of GHGs emissions, which will come into force only in 2005, an important result has been achieved, above all because it constitutes the first example of a legally binding global treaty in history. The EU established a new implementation tool, the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS)<sup>26</sup> to control emissions of pollutants and greenhouse gases at international level in order to enforce the environmental constraints imposed by the Kyoto Protocol on each State<sup>27</sup>. If on the one hand economic growth, reinforced by globalization, had allowed several countries to reduce the level of poverty, others had witnessed a deterioration in socio-economic conditions, with an increase in income inequality and an incalculable environmental damage. Developing countries were disappointed that industrialized countries did not realize their commitments to increase aid for Official Development Assistance (ODA)<sup>28</sup> and the absence of new and additional resources sufficient to cope with the higher costs resulting from the commitment to tackle problems on a global scale. In this sense, the 1998 Cardiff summit was a key moment for redesigning the path of environmental policy. Another important Convention is the one signed in Aarhus in Denmark (1998), on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (UNECE)<sup>29</sup>. The Aarhus Convention therefore recognized the fundamental human right to a healthy environment by identifying access to information, participation of citizens in

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<sup>22</sup> Treaty on European Union, (92/C 191/01), TITLE II, PROVISIONS AMENDING THE TREATY ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY WITH A VIEW TO ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, Article G, Article 2, Official Journal of the European Communities.

Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A11992M%2FTXT>

<sup>23</sup> WILKINSON D., *Maastricht and the environment: The implications for the EC's environment policy of the treaty on European union*, Journal of Environmental Law 4(2) January 2002, pp.35-45.

<sup>24</sup> HRISTOVA S., DRAGIĆEVIĆ ŠEŠIĆ M., DUXBURY N., *Culture and Sustainability in European Cities: Imagining Europolis*, Routledge, April 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Treaty of Amsterdam Amending The Treaty On European Union, The Treaties Establishing The European Communities And Certain Related Acts (97/C340/01), Article 2, Amsterdam, 1997.

Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:11997D/AFI>

<sup>26</sup> Introduced and regulated in European legislation by Directive 2003/87 / EC (ETS Directive). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32003L0087>

<sup>27</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.minambiente.it/pagina/emission-trading>

<sup>28</sup> commitment agreed in the context of the Rio Conference and provided for the transfer of financial resources from the North to the South of the world through the destination of 0.7% of the GDP of each Country for Official Development Aid (ODA).

<sup>29</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.unece.org/env/pp/introduction.html>



decision-making processes and access to justice in environmental matters, the three pillars on which to build a new model of environmental democracy. Environmental policies should have been based on a comparison with the social actors involved and translated into shared strategies. The Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP6) in The Hague (November 13-24, 2000) aimed to reach an agreement on the effective implementation of the content of the Kyoto Protocol and in particular on rules defined for the application of the envisaged flexibility mechanisms. The failure of the Hague Conference testified a sign of the inability of governments to take on a problem with great economic implications, both for present generations and for future ones.

## *II. The Millennium Summit and the MDGs*

Turning the effects of globalization on behalf of all countries was the main challenge the world recognized in September 2000 during the Millennium Summit. The Declaration laid the foundations for the adoption of global policies and measures, corresponding to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition, aimed at reducing the economic, social and environmental divide that globalization was generating, defining a series of ambitious objectives to be achieved by 2015 called the MDGs<sup>30</sup>. The 8 objectives were associated with 21 targets<sup>31</sup>. However, despite the signing of the MDGs from parts of all member countries, they did not have a binding character but only an ethical value and therefore they referred to governments, civil society and the private sector, the commitment to take concrete actions in order to pursue these goals. The Sixth EAP (2001-2010). The member countries now become 28 and environmental policy will be in this new Action Program, the fundamental pillar of European action. The EU strongly presupposed the assumption of common but differentiated responsibilities and forced to redefine the production processes and above all the traditional decision-making processes in order to promote Sustainable Development. The actions and strategies proposed and put in place since 2000 could not fail to take into account the change taking place within the EU started with the enlargement process. In this direction, the so-called 'Lisbon Strategy' concerned a series of structural reforms in the fields of employment, innovation, economic reform, social cohesion and the environment, through actions aimed at promoting scientific research, education, access to the Internet, the modernization of social security systems, raising the employment rate and environmental sustainability. The Lisbon Strategy had the merit of identifying the economic and social dimensions as the two main pillars of European politics. A long-term strategy proposal (SDS) for the coordination of sustainable development policies was approved at the Göteborg European Council in June 2001 and had the merit of definitively inserting the environmental dimension as third pillar of the European policy into the process of Sustainable Development, that was to be added the first

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<sup>30</sup> Retrieved at [http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/mdg\\_goals.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/mdg_goals.html)

<sup>31</sup> SACHS J. D., MCARTHUR J. W., «The Millennium Project: a plan for meeting the Millennium Development Goals», in *The Lancet*, 2005, pp.347-353.

two pillars, social and economic, defined by the Lisbon Strategy<sup>32</sup>. Underlying the EU's strategic change was the belief that the impact of globalization required a radical transformation of the European economy, while respecting the values and concepts of society. The Göteborg European Council therefore invited member states to outline their national strategies for Sustainable Development, underlining the importance of a broad consultation of all stakeholders. More generally, there was a possible contradiction between the main objective of the Lisbon Strategy, that is to achieve an EU economic growth as strong as possible, and pursue Sustainable Development, which was given a marginal and imprecise qualification regarding the mechanisms of formation of political guidelines for its implementation. The COP6-bis, held in Bonn in July 2001, had confirmed the distance of strategic position between the EU and the main industrialized countries. Inevitably, a central element of the credibility of the EU in the coming years, was managing to build a global governance that involves the main players responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases. On a global level, although the EU continues to be one of the most active international actors in the environmental field, the international conventions which, up until the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 had followed one another after Rio, turned out to be mostly an occasion for long discussions and of mere declarations of intent. However, the EU turned out to be the one who, more than the others, had succeeded in a more effective way to give life to concrete initiatives, at least from a political point of view. More recently, in 1999, the National Research Council (NCR), defined the idea of Sustainable Development as *"The reconciliation of society's developmental goals with the planet's environmental limits over the long term"*<sup>33</sup>. In most developing countries, it was difficult to reconcile the need to reduce poverty without harming the environment. Therefore, it was not coincidence that in Johannesburg particular attention will be given to the issue of poverty reduction<sup>34</sup>.

### III. Johannesburg Conference: the international commitment for the future

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg by 26 August to 4 September 2002 had the purpose to verify the state of implementation of the commitments undertaken in Rio ten years earlier and to detect the objectives set by the United Nations in the Millennium Declaration of September 2000. Unfortunately, little progress has been made on the road to Sustainable Development. The expectations hoped for at the beginning of the new millennium, did not find confirmation in reality. Since then, progress has been extremely slow and the situation in the global environment was still far from satisfactory<sup>35</sup>. The WSSD, produced a political declaration, "The

<sup>32</sup> Retrieved at <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/>

<sup>33</sup> National Research Council Board on Sustainable Development, *Our Common Journey, a Transition Toward Sustainability*. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C, 1999, pag 2.

<sup>34</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament entitled Ten years after Rio: preparing for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (COM (2001) 53 – C5-0342/2001 – 2001/2142(COS)). Retrieved at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A5-2002-0151+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

<sup>35</sup> GARDNER G., *The challenge for Johannesburg: Creating a More Secure World*, in L.Starke (ed.), *State of the World 2002: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society* (New York: W.W. Norton), 2002, pp.3-23.

Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development from our origins to the future", and an annex "Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development". In Johannesburg, more emphasis was put on establishing partnerships agreements, but its preparation and development took place in a climate of strong skepticism. The stakeholders presented themselves at the Summit with different objectives and expectations. Due to the disengagement of the United States<sup>36</sup> and other industrialized countries, an attitude for which, official documents and declarations signed, would always remain empty proclamation of intent<sup>37</sup>. Unfortunately, the WSSD was part of a corporate context in which the footprint of globalization was strongly imposing and in which market laws were significantly influencing global governance. An era inflated by the myth of well-being in which it was difficult to glimpse a space for a real protection of the environment, which not only did not produce profit, but rather represented an economic cost for governments. Moreover, it was an extremely delicate historical moment due to the genesis of international terrorism following the events of 11 September, but it was also true that an incontrovertible cause was the lack of a single approach between the financial, commercial, investment, technology and policy systems, based on short-term rather than long-term considerations, as well as in order to pursue Sustainable Development. Unlike the Rio summit, following which the denunciation of the problems substantially aroused the attention of the scientific world, Johannesburg aroused therefore a sensitization of the world public opinion<sup>38</sup>. On these issues, the EU's tendency has been to continue to play a leading role both for European Union member countries and for the entire Euro-Mediterranean area, as well as for continuing the many activities linked to international cooperation. One of the greatest difficulties encountered by the EU in implementing the Rio principles was its financial availability. The countries of the European Union defended the reasons for environmentalism and came out satisfied with the WSSD of Johannesburg, having managed to close the Summit with an agreement, avoiding a break that would have weighed on international relations for many years<sup>39</sup>. Nevertheless, the Lisbon Strategy had shown clear difficulties in its implementation, so much so that, in 2005, halfway through the path originally agreed, the Strategy appears to be a substantial failure. In particular, in 2005 the Heads of State and Government of the European Union decided to reformulate the Lisbon Strategy according to two perspectives: economic growth and employment. In addition, knowledge and innovation - knowledge understood as a 'common good' that should have been raised the innovative and competitive capacity of the European production system. The relaunching of the Lisbon Strategy was envisaged as a crucial political pattern in the construction of a model of development and cohesion. The relaunch of the Lisbon strategy proposed the definitive integration of the Lisbon Strategy with that of Göteborg and was strongly inscribed in the global vision of Sustainable Development that allows the continuous improvement of the quality of life of current

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<sup>36</sup> which did not want to set any targets on the subject of renewable energy

<sup>37</sup> SERAFINI M., *Dopo Johannesburg. Fallimenti e speranze*, in La rivista del manifesto, n. 32, October 2002.

<sup>38</sup> HENS L., NATH B., *The World Summit on Sustainable Development: The Johannesburg Conference*, Springer Science & Business Media, 2006, pp.300-305.

<sup>39</sup> *op.cit.*, PALLEMAERTS M., AZMANOVA A., pp.105-108.

and future generations. In this general context, important changes and simplifications are introduced in the instruments necessary to meet the objectives set by the Strategy. The areas to be assessed with the indicator system became five: labor market; social cohesion; training; innovation; environment. The Council also launched the integrated and sustainable European ‘2020 climate & energy package’ policy, which will lead to a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; realization of 20% of consumption with renewable energy sources; 20% increase in energy efficiency<sup>40</sup>.

In a broader perspective, it is stressed that at this time the accent was placed on Sustainable Development through the Green Economy<sup>41</sup>. This demonstrates that environmental sustainability became a determining factor, at least in official documents, of the new global scenario, to the point of raising some important questions on the validity of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), an indicator of the economic performance of States. The feeling that it was dawning was that probably GDP, was no longer the appropriate tool to assess the quality of the development of countries, especially when compared to the social and economic conditions of some classes of the world population, but also to comply with minimum guarantee standards of fundamental human rights. However, in 2008, at the end of the first cycle, progress in the individual areas was unfortunately modest despite the great and positive effort by member states and the EC to work together for sustainability. The break-up of the international financial crisis from December 2007 to June 2009 partly nullified the progress made in the decade and it highlighted the limits of the reform process undertaken. The Lisbon experience promoted the exchange of best practices among member countries, taking into account the interdependence of individual national economies in an increasingly integrated economic and social context<sup>42</sup>.

One of the most dramatic phases of the global crisis coincided in Europe with the entry into force on 1 December 2009 of the Lisbon Treaty of 2007. It amends the Maastricht Treaty (1993), known as European Union Treaty (2007) or TEU, and the Treaty of Rome (1957), known in the updated form as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2007) or TFEU<sup>43</sup>. Overall, the Lisbon Treaty innovated the process of community integration, providing greater opportunities for the implementation of the new Strategy which will be further renamed in 2010 with the name "Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>44</sup>". It is for this reason that 2010 is celebrated as a turning point. The feverish work of the European institutions in dealing with the emergencies of the crisis resulted in

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<sup>40</sup> The targets were set by EU leaders in 2007 and enacted in legislation in 2009. They were also headline targets of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The 2020 package is a set of binding legislation to ensure the EU meets its climate and energy targets for the year 2020. Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020_en)

<sup>41</sup> UNEP has defined the green economy as “one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. It is low carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive” (UNEP, 2011)

<sup>42</sup> BARNES P.M., HOERBER T.C., *Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe: The Evolution of the Discourse on Sustainability*, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community (OJ C 306, 17.12.2007); entry into force on 1 December 2009.

Retrieved at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT>

<sup>44</sup> European Commission, COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION, *EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, COM (2010) 2020 final, Brussels, 3.3.2010.

Retrieved at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52010DC2020>

progressively redefining the political and economic governance of the EU. The novelties represented by the introduction of the President of the European Council and the strengthening of the powers of the traditional institutions. The Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council in fact formulated a new institutional framework that showed itself in the decision-making process of the EU government. The new "Europe 2020" strategy should have strengthened the social dimension, combining the economic recovery strategy, the strategy for growth and employment enhancing the role of public-private partnership as a driver of public investment and attention to climate change in an effective and coherent way<sup>45</sup>. In this sense, the Europe 2020 strategy outlines a framework of the social market economy for the next decade, focusing on three priority areas: intelligent growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. The architecture of the Europe 2020 strategy was based on the good functioning of the European Internal Market, which remained the driving force behind European integration.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### From Millennium Development Goals to SDGs

#### I. *The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development: Rio+20, 'The Future We Want'*

The overall balance of almost forty years of community environmental policies presented lights and shadows. Indeed, during the Cop 13, an action plan was launched to reach a global agreement. Its purpose should include an increase in the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction requirements of rich countries and the inclusion of emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil, which until then had not respected any constraints because they were considered developing countries, with the aim to block the exponential growth of their emissions. According to the forecasts, the new treaty should have been adopted at Cop 15 in Copenhagen in 2009, but the outcome was unsatisfactory because the Conference ended with a mere political agreement without any constraint or concrete objective that had only one worthy passage concerning the containment of the increase in the average global temperature below the 2°C expected. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in June 2012, known as the Rio+20<sup>46</sup>, stood at the height of these events, while Sustainable Development seemed to be losing its historic drive for the environment and development. At the base of this new meeting there would have been the will to analyze honestly and consistently the feedback of the last two decades, identifying strengths and weaknesses achieved in the path towards Sustainable Development and

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<sup>45</sup> *op.cit.*, BARNES P.M., HOERBER T.C., Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe: The Evolution of the Discourse on Sustainability, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20, 2012.  
Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20>

renewing the political commitment. In order to quickly recover the maximum consensus, the "compromise text" was probably the main political decision of the Conference, given its centrality in helping to define the program that in 2015 will give continuity in a shared form to the MDGs. The approval of the shared final document of Rio+20 entitled "The future We Want", reaffirms the principles and renews the commitments already taken by the Rio 1992 Summit, on which consensus was granted, but does not define for the future neither objectives, strategies, nor any concrete commitment to be achieved. The Green Economy was for the first time included in the global agenda. The final document explicitly recognizes that Green Economy can contribute to sustainable development and to the fight against poverty. Although it was clear that Green Economy was now a compulsory and shared path, no explications were given, simply limiting the role of Green Economy to the fundamental principle of Sustainable Development. This principle had to be consistent with the strategies and commitments already taken and had to be consistent with international laws, respecting, in particular, the principle of national sovereignty. In this vague context, each country was free to choose which approach to adopt for Green Economy and which strategy to implement<sup>47</sup>. The Rio+20 summit was characterized by an absolute lack of political leadership, which produced a document that contained no concrete commitment. There has been no concrete about financial aid to poor countries to support their transition to a fair and Green Economy. The only positive note was the strong vitality of civil society and the dynamism of part of the companies present. For the rest, the game was played on the one hand by a Europe unable to exercise real power, on the other, by emerging countries with a fluctuating economic attitude. The US, on the other hand, was not interested in making a concrete change for sustainability, given the heavy weight of the oil lobbies so that the situation would remain unchanged. The big multinationals continued to grow and advance, restricting the democratic spaces and destroying the ecosystems to enrich themselves and save the economic-financial system. In June 2011, the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions was also announced, "Rio+20: towards the green economy and better governance<sup>48</sup>", which proposed specific actions to be implemented at international, national and regional levels. In fact, the EU proposed the adoption of an action framework called the "Green Economy Roadmap" which set out certain paths of implementation with indication of times and objectives in the areas related to the transition to the green economy to be pursued internationally. However, the final Rio+20 document decreed the failure of the European Green Economy Roadmap and UNEP did not obtain the status of Agency for Sustainable Development, as a

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<sup>47</sup> ANDONOVA L.B., HOFFMANN M.J., *From Rio to Rio and Beyond Innovation in Global Environmental Governance*, The Journal of Environment & Development 21, no.1 (2012), pp.57-61.

<sup>48</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Brussels, 20.6.2011 COM (2011) 363 final. Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52011DC0363>

result of the combined vetoes of China and the United States<sup>49</sup>. In November 2012, the seventh EAP (2013-2020), will guide the EU's political action on environment and climate until 2020.

## II. *'Transforming our World': the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs*

Overall, the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro had effectively triggered the mainstreaming of Sustainable Development in world politics. After all, the fight against climate change highlighted - global emissions at +30% compared to 1990, instead of reduced and concretely we continued to postpone the adoption and compliance with concrete measures to combat this phenomenon<sup>50</sup>. The Kyoto Protocol had been extended until 2020 during the COP18 in Doha in 2012, the EU, was seriously committed to meeting the emission reduction. In the 2015 Assessment Report<sup>51</sup> of the MDGs, important progress was noted, in particular in halving extreme poverty according to objectives and partly in access to education and health, however, at a global level, it was still very far from the objectives of the Millennium in most cases and severely due to climate and environmental degradation. The Addis Ababa Conference of July 2015, world leaders have sought ways to cope financially with the ambitious and costly goals of Sustainable Development (SDGs), which will be implemented through the 2030 Agenda a few months later in the New York Conference. The Addis Ababa Conference for financing for development (FFD), produced a document of agreement that contained the criteria for financially supporting the 2030 Agenda. It provides a new global framework for financing sustainable development by aligning all financing flows and policies with economic, social and environmental priorities<sup>52</sup>. On 25 September 2015, the 70th session of the General Assembly was able to host the United National Sustainable Development Summit in New York and an informal parallel meeting on climate dialogue<sup>53</sup>. The final text, adopted with Resolution 70/1, entitled "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development<sup>54</sup>", contained the 17 new objectives of Sustainable Development renamed SDGs accompanied by 169 targets that partially quantify the objectives - which would have replaced and integrated the 8 MDGs born during the Millennium summit and close to expiry. The signatory countries should have provided their contribution on the basis of their respective capacities and the state of implementation of the objectives was monitored by the United Nations through the HLPF which used about 240 statistical indicators related to the objectives and targets, approved by the UN but also at the

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<sup>49</sup> *op.cit.*, BARNES P.M., HOERBER T.C., *Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe: The Evolution of the Discourse on Sustainability*, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Retrieved at <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/>

<sup>51</sup> Global assessment report on disaster risk reduction 2015.

Retrieved at <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/42809>

<sup>52</sup> The Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July 2015. Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/534\\_pt](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/534_pt)

<sup>53</sup> The United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda was held from 25 to 27 September 2015, in New York and convened as a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly.

Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/summit>

<sup>54</sup> On 25 September, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Resolution 70/1, "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=111&nr=8496&menu=35>



regional level, through the UN Regional Economic Commissions. The 2030 Agenda thus sanctioned the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs. A conceptual difference can be recognized by the fact that the MDGs were aimed at poor countries to which rich countries would have to provide technical and financial assistance, while the SDGs, proposed goals and challenges for all world governments in an indistinct way. Therefore, the focus was shifting from the help of the industrialized countries towards the poor countries to a conception of a global vision of the pursuit of intergenerational wellbeing extended in the temporal sense<sup>55</sup>. The need to involve all countries derived from the role that each country had in determining the change in economic, social and environmental dynamics in a globalized world in which social, financial and environmental instabilities could affect another country and influence the functioning of the whole terrestrial ecosystem. However, the new structure of the SDGs presented significant criticalities. The major criticism, always moved, at the end of the previous summits, had always been that of not being able to set concrete and quantified objectives for Sustainable Development and above all the fact of having to rely on the will of initiative by the individual states. In the UN vision, the 17 SDGs are not hierarchically ordered because the idea was to reach them simultaneously and contextually. In this sense, the non-hierarchization of the SDGs leads to obvious contradictions. For instance, Goal 8, - which proposed to support per capita economic growth in accordance with national conditions with an annual growth of at least 7% of gross domestic product in developing countries - was found to be incompatible with Goal 13 proposing to take urgent measures to combat climate change, as the need to increase GDP would inevitably lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions due to an acceleration in energy consumption. Moreover, the natural limits of the earth had not been mentioned and there was no clear language on the decarbonisation of production, transport and consumption; human rights were mentioned in the preamble and in the declaration, but they were not very evident as guiding elements of the objectives and targets; no timetable had been set for achieving gender equality<sup>56</sup>.

### III. *The Paris Agreement on climate change*

The UN depicted 2015 as watershed year that marked a turning point in the change in the paradigm of development and for which “*no one will be left behind*” and to “*endeavour to reach the furthest behind first*”<sup>57</sup>. In December 2015<sup>58</sup>, “Paris Agreement”<sup>59</sup>, provided for the objective of limiting the increase in the Earth's temperature well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels, with a

<sup>55</sup> SACHS J.D., *L'era dello sviluppo sostenibile*, ed.it. Milano, Università Bocconi Editore, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> BROWNE S., *Sustainable Development Goals and UN Goal-Setting*, Taylor & Francis, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>58</sup> COP 21, Paris, 2015. Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

<sup>59</sup> Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 12 December 2015. The Agreement enters into force on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2016, the thirtieth day after the date on which at least 55 Parties to the Convention accounting in total for at least an estimated 55 per cent of the total global greenhouse gas emissions have deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.



commitment to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. The agreements, aimed at limiting - and not reducing, as in the past - emissions, needed the ratification of at least 55 countries representing 55% of the emissions of polluting gases into the atmosphere. They came into force on 4 November 2016, thanks to the global consensus of India and China, as well as the United States. Indeed, the Paris climate conference gave rise to a historic global political agreement to combat climate change. Almost all of the international community seemed to have also agreed on a point of view of international environmental law that had always been lacking due to the powerlessness of the international community itself. The Paris Agreement had a considerable media impact all over the world. Nevertheless, the Paris Agreement contained multiple areas of ambiguity. The first obvious ambiguity. It did not provide for a legally binding value - so much so that it was possible to exit the Paris Agreements - as was the case with a Protocol (e.g. Kyoto Protocol), and furthermore no sanction was provided for the failure compliance with the commitments. A second ambiguity concerns the method for determining the commitments made which was commissioned to the individual countries. Governments should have established how and when to implement the GHGs targets - given the long-term nature of targets, for which a deadline had not been specified – but in this way, every government could act autonomously without urgency, thus maintaining ample room for freedom of action. In the same way, the decision to set the first global evaluation on emission reductions in 2023 was a contradiction given the long run and the risk that the long-time frame for expiration could have increased pollution. Therefore, in the presence of multiple and conflicting interests, the praiseworthy commitments under the agreement remained, once again, only good intentions for the future<sup>60</sup>. At the European level, the scenario in 2016 was marked by Brexit popular referendum in the United Kingdom which, on 23 June 2016, voted in favour of leaving the European Union. However, between August and September 2016, reflection on the role of Europe in economic planning and development focused on Sustainable Development. On 22 November 2016, the EU Commission published three Communications to define a new strategic approach to Sustainable Development. The first, entitled “Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability<sup>61</sup>”, the second, entitled “Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development - Our World, our Dignity, our Future<sup>62</sup>”, the third instead, was joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council entitled “A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific<sup>63</sup>”. Among the limits of the

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<sup>60</sup> KLEIN D., CARAZO M.P., DOELLE M., BULMER J., HIGHAM A., *The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Analysis and Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability, {SWD (2016) 390 final}, COM (2016) 739 final, Strasbourg, 22.11.2016. Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2016%3A739%3AFIN>

<sup>62</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development - Our World, our Dignity, our Future, COM (2016) 740 final, Strasbourg, 22.11.2016. Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2016:740:FIN>

<sup>63</sup> JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL, A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, JOIN(2016) 52 final, Strasbourg, 22.11.2016.

European action for sustainability, the lack of a vision that went beyond just the environmental question and the absence of an explicit reference to the role of companies in achieving the SDGs was evident. In March 2017, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the international conference "Europe Ambition 2030" renewed the commitment to bring the 2030 Agenda to the centre of European policies. The organizations of Europe Ambition 2030 then drafted "Scenario 6: A sustainable Europe for its citizens", proposed by the European Commission on what could be the state of the Union until 2025 - presenting the vision of a Europe that places sustainability at the heart of European projects. In view of the UN COP23 on climate change in Bonn<sup>64</sup>, the EU aimed to advance the implementation of the Paris agreement. The conclusions of the Council of the European Union stressed the importance of carrying out the right tools to implement climate policies outlined in the "2030 framework for energy and climate policies for the EU"<sup>65</sup>, adopted by the European Council in October 2014.

2018 began with the adoption by the EU of a first strategy on plastics, "The European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy"<sup>66</sup>, which aims to protect the environment from plastic pollution and at the same time promote growth and innovation, contributing concretely to the achievement of the 2030 SDGs and the objectives of the Paris climate change Agreement. The goal is to make all plastic packaging on the EU market recyclable by 2030, to reduce the use of disposable plastic and to limit the intentional use of microplastics. At international level, last year was characterized by long shadows of a political confrontation between the European Union and China on one side, and the United States on the other. US President Trump was the only country that asked to exit the agreements signed at the time by former President Barack Obama. Already in 2017, the US President had aired the hypothesis of the exit from the agreements, only to have a rethinking at the beginning of 2018 and for this reason, China was wary of the United States to take the same attitude as with the Kyoto Protocol, never ratified by the Americans. Moreover, the geopolitical scenario around the climate could change further with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, which, by its own admission, does not seem to want to undertake a path of decarbonisation and oriented towards a Sustainable Development. Despite the hostile geopolitical context and a multilateral system that suffers from the multiplication of nationalistic tendencies, the 24th Conference of Parties (COP) of UNFCCC members was organized in Poland<sup>67</sup>. The Katowice Conference, held from 3 to 14 December 2018, the 196-member states of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) managed to translate the Paris Climate Agreement into rules of international law. The "Katowice climate package"<sup>68</sup> produced by COP24 indicate in detail how member states will have to provide information on the commitments adopted and

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<sup>64</sup> The 2017 UN Climate Conference COP23 took place in Bonn, Germany, from 6-18 November. Retrieved at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cop23/>

<sup>65</sup> Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030_en)

<sup>66</sup> Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0028&from=EN>

<sup>67</sup> Katowice Climate Change Conference, December 2018. Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/katowice>

<sup>68</sup> Katowice Climate Package. Retrieved at <https://unfccc.int/news/new-era-of-global-climate-action-to-begin-under-paris-climate-change-agreement-0>

the actions taken on climate and environment<sup>69</sup>. The EU, on the one hand, presented itself to COP24 and strengthened its image as leader of the action for climate and Sustainable Development, but on the other hand it will not hide the burdensome financing granted to fossil fuels<sup>70</sup>.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SDGs and Italy

#### *I. The ASviS Report 2018*

The great opportunity we have to face today is to channel the efforts put into place to shape all our actions on sustainability with a view to integrating national and international policies. Each country has the task of declining the 2030 Agenda taking into account its situation to contribute in different ways to bring the whole world on a path of Sustainable Development. For this reason, what is the current situation of Italy today compared to the Sustainable Development Goals indicated by 2030 Agenda?

In this regard, the ASviS Report 2018<sup>71</sup> perfectly portrays the situation of Italy with respect to the SDGs. The Report also contains an assessment of the actions implemented by the government in the last year in the economic, social and environmental fields, and proposes the policies that should be undertaken in the coming months and years to bring Italy on a path of Sustainable Development. The picture that emerges from the 2018 Report of the Alleanza Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile (ASviS) shows, according to the composite indicators<sup>72</sup> that, since 2010, Italy has worsened in five areas of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda concerning poverty, the economic and employment situation, social inequalities, the conditions of cities and the terrestrial ecosystem. Furthermore, it emerges that for four areas that belong to the SDGs, such as water and sanitation, the energy system, the condition of the seas and finally the quality of governance, peace, justice and solid institutions, the situation has remained unchanged over the last few years. However, from the 2018 Report of the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) there are also signs of improvement with regard to food and sustainable agriculture, health, education, gender equality, innovation, sustainable models of production and consumption, fight against climate change, international cooperation.

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<sup>69</sup><https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2018/12/16/the-uns-latest-climate-meeting-ends-positively>

<sup>70</sup> numerous publications concerning the financing of the aforementioned European financial institutions towards the fossil industry can be found on the official website retrieved at <https://bankwatch.org/>

<sup>71</sup> ASviS Report 2018. Retrieved at <http://asvis.it/rapporto-asvis-2018/>

<sup>72</sup> the composite indicator Apps (Assessment, Projection and Policy of Sustainable Development Goals) offers a measure of current well-being and future sustainability obtained by summarizing 28 indicators, which in turn represent 16 of the 17 SDGs, which are a subset of those identified by UN. Given the structure of the model, Goal 5 (gender equality) remains excluded, although some indicators of other Goals (in particular 1.4.8, 10 and 17) also concern the condition of women.

## II. *Italy is not on a path of sustainable development*

As was shown, the Report is also the “bearer” of the initiatives of numerous economic and social subjects that are changing the business, production, consumption and behaviour models, which are demonstrating evident benefits. The Report, in fact, signals the important policies adopted in the last twelve months, as the introduction of the “Reddito di Inclusione (REI)” to reduce poverty and missed opportunities, such as the interruption of legislative procedures concerning the reduction of land consumption, the right to water, fair trade, or the lack of measures to implement the Third Sector reform. An important signal has been launched since 2017, with the “Strategia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile” which has become the basis for setting the 2017 Budget Law, while the so-called “BES indicator<sup>73</sup>” for a fair and sustainable welfare, assess the progress of a society not only from an economic point of view, but also social and environmental and is a defining factor for the Economic Document and finance. However, for many Goals, the distances from the other European countries remain very large for our country<sup>74</sup>. Based on the Apps Index (Assessment, Projection and Policy of Sustainable Development Goals)<sup>75</sup>, Italy currently ranks 15th among the 45 areas considered, but within the European Union, Italian performance is better only than of Czech Republic, Spain and Greece. Overall, Italy is very far from the top of the ranking, occupied by the Scandinavian countries such as Sweden. Italy is strongly lagging behind in the economic dimension, moderately late for the social one, while the environmental one is negatively affected by the inefficient use of water resources and high pollution deriving from the residential and transport sectors. From an institutional point of view, the current division of tasks among state, regional and local bodies is not aligned with the logic of the 2030 Agenda and makes it impossible to ensure an integrated and long-term vision. According to professor Enrico Giovannini, founder and spokesperson of the ASviS, to date it is essential to respect the interdependence of the sectors to accommodate the challenge of the complexity of the 2030 Agenda. From an analytical point of view, the ASviS 2018 report proposes an integrated interpretation of the condition of our country and presents different scenarios calculated in 2030 using a model of general economic equilibrium that indicates how “business as usual” policies are not able to significantly improve the wellbeing, equity and sustainability of the Italian State-System, which could even worsen its position with respect to its European partners. On the contrary, the adoption of a systemic vision of development, capable of ensuring a set of economic, social and environmental policies would significantly improve

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<sup>73</sup> BES is the indicator for a fair and sustainable welfare developed by ISTAT and CNEL and with the Budget Law n.163/2016, approved on July 28, 2016, it entered for the first time in the State Budget to evaluate the effect of public policies on some fundamental social dimensions. Retrieved at <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/224669>

<sup>74</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>75</sup> APPS is a project developed by Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei (FEEM) to contribute to the worldwide research community working on the assessment of historical and future trends of SDGs Indicators as well as on the measurement of the effects of policies designed to improve sustainability all over the World. It also provides synthetic indices by sustainability dimension and a multi-dimensional index.

Retrieved at <http://www.iccgov.org/en/assessments-projections-and-policies-for-sustainable-development-goals/>

the overall performance of the country. In particular, among the possible interventions, it should be noted that in the coming months, i.e. within the current legislature, it is necessary to complete, on the one hand, the approval process of laws on the reduction of land consumption, the right to water, fair trade and the implementation measures for the reform of the Third Sector and, on the other, to reform strategies concerning the energy issue, the circular economy, the fight against climate change, which are crucial for the future of the country. Furthermore, ASviS reiterates the urgency of introducing Sustainable Development between the fundamental principles of our Constitution and as regards the fight against inequality, the issue of gender equality becomes crucial. It is necessary to intervene on the forthcoming Budget Law 2019 which must understand the enormous economic opportunities offered by the transition to Sustainable Development and must be provided with a report on the expected impact on the 12 indicators of BES index which entered in financial planning to accelerate the achievement of the 22 targets that must be achieved by 2020. In this sense, 2019 is more than ever a crucial year for this issue because the EU is called to elect the European Parliament, the new Commission and the European Council, which will have to indicate together the future direction of the EU, poised between greater political integration, the maintenance of the *status quo* or even the fall-back on issues closely linked to the functioning of the financial markets. It is worth nothing that Europe is so far the leading exponent of Sustainable Development and has played a key role in the negotiation of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreements and many other international conventions on the various aspects of Sustainable Development. The indicators currently available show that European countries are on average more advanced in achieving the SDGs than in the rest of the world. However, the EU is lagging behind on the definition of concrete plans for the ecological transition, the education of the new generations and the circular economy. The answer to this incompleteness lies in the full insertion of the 2030 Agenda into European policies and in the program that will replace the “Europe 2020” Strategy. In order to implement the 2030 Agenda, a clear indication of the current distribution of tasks between Union and member states is crucial, which dates back to the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, when the economic, technological, social and environmental changes underway had not yet the magnitude we are experiencing nowadays. Added to this are the evident difficulties in managing phenomena such as immigration and security and the record number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion (about 120 million) which demonstrate the evident unsustainability of the current development model, to such an extent that the growing success of the European nationalist movements is causing enormous risks for the identity and the very idea of the Union. It is therefore clear that the fundamental principles of the EU, which have been consolidated over the decades through the multiple treaties of the Community, must be associated with a strategic vision of the future of the Union that can realize the principles established over time<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> *op.cit.*, GIOVANNINI E., 2018, *L'Utopia Sostenibile*, Laterza.

## Conclusions

The evolution of sustainability thinking has brought environmental issues to the centre of ethical reflection on relations between humanity and nature. Given the global scale of the human impact on the environment, the connection with social justice issues is increasingly evident. The turning point in the culture and in the collective awareness marked by the *The Limits to Growth* report has constituted a truly revolutionary transition including in the international debate the perception that, despite the impressive development of technology we must deal with the finite dimension of natural resources and that the infinite growth of wealth could prove incompatible with the insufficient amount of natural resources.

It was 1987 when *Our Common Future* was published, the final report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), set up under the UN in 1983 and chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report is still considered a cornerstone of reflection on environmental issues and their connection with socio-economic imbalances. This was followed by all subsequent global documents and conferences including the 2030 UN Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in September 2015. The Brundtland Report contains the most commonly used and most accredited definition of Sustainable Development: “*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. It was a revolutionary document that enunciated the link between environment and development, the interdependence between nations in the management of environment, the extension of the concept of development to that of social equity and it identified three main obstacles on the road to achieving a development compatible with the defense of the environment; the almost absolute dependence on fossil fuels as an energy source for human activities, the irrepressible demographic explosion of the countries of the South of the world; the inadequacy of the institutional framework to coordinate and impose global economic, technological and ecological choices essential for the pursuit of effective Sustainable Development.

30 years later - after many analyzes, discussions, commitments and criticisms - we can say that sustainability has entered our vocabulary, the reflection on sustainable development has progressively established itself at the political, scientific, legal and cultural levels, up to become the paradigm of reference for the people and planet of the XXI century with the approval by the United Nations of the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, as seen in the above, it cannot be said that a practical application to such theoretical paradigmatic change has been given. Despite some progress, the economic and social system is still far from being considered sustainable. A balanced relationship between humanity and the environment in which it lives is not yet within reach.

Following the evolution of the debate on Sustainable Development, it is essential to grasp the integrated and multidimensional approach of sustainability in its anthropocentric perspective, which challenges environmental ethics as an expression of a fundamental responsibility towards future generations. The affirmation of a temporal-space dimension of sustainability poses the question of safeguarding and careful and responsible use of nature as a criterion of justice referring to a fair access and an equal distribution of the resources of the entire planet Earth for all (intragenerational dimension) and for future generations (intergenerational dimension).

In this perspective, reflecting on the urgency of sustainability means recognizing the natural limits of our planet as a qualifier for Sustainable Development, which places constraints on the consumption of resources compared to their own capacity for regeneration, at the rate of use of renewables, pollution and waste production compared to the assimilation capacity of natural systems. In this sense, Sustainable Development overcomes the traditional anthropocentric vision, placing, from an economic and social point of view, human development within the limits set by the Earth's ecosystem.

In a biocentric vision, the natural limits of our planet should not however be understood as a renunciation of seeking an improvement in human conditions and its relations with the environment, but rather as an opportunity for man to achieve his activity of social progress through a greater efficiency in the use of resources and a reduction in consumption and pollution, placing at the centre of its action the moral primacy of nature and denying any form of hierarchy of man himself on other living beings as a foundation of their ethical and social norms. This interpretation of the Sustainable Development approach allows us to understand with ever greater precision how human societies are inserted and interact with ecosystem dynamics. Sustainable development proposes an integrated reading of the different dimensions on which human society is articulated, such as social, economic and environmental, capturing the close interweaving of relations between social systems and natural systems.

It is clear that the environment, seen in its entirety, concerns the relationships of men with other living beings and therefore this relationship cannot be subjected to an imposing stress due to the affirmation of man's dominion over nature according to an erroneous anthropocentric vision of life that exploits industrial production and the intensive use of energy as activities necessary for the improvement of the human condition. This awareness must therefore be immediately translated into concrete actions by all the players involved (governments, institutions, companies, financial operators, organizations, associations, citizens) at all social levels to avoid that sustainability remains just a slogan.

The pursuit of a Sustainable Development is based on an ever more timely and growing collection and processing of knowledge and scientific data to understand the impacts on nature, as well as on an increasingly precise reading of the interrelations between natural and social systems. To date, new problems and threats have emerged but nevertheless new scientific and technological acquisitions have brought hopes for the future and greater knowledge. We have acquired the awareness that

unfortunately it is difficult to change economic-social systems and lifestyles, but also that the results achieved are always provisional and unstable. On these grounds, with a view to Sustainable Development, the environmental question can no longer be relegated to the problem of pollution and to the exploitation of environmental resources, but it takes on a global dimension that involves, albeit in a different way, all the dimensions of the society. The condition of human life over time is the set of delicate balances that guarantee the maintenance and development of life on the planet, which increasingly depend on the human capacity to reduce the ecological footprint and to seek new balances in the relationship with the natural environment and its resources.

The paradigm of Sustainable Development, therefore, has helped to understand for the first time to the governments of the world that, at this point in human history, the need to integrate environmental aspects in the discussions on social development. It is essential to make an active transformation of the environment on a global scale rather than to limit the action to adapt to the environment.

Sustainable Development is today one of the key points of EU policies. The approach and models adopted are probably the right ones to address economic, social and environmental challenges. The wide European range of environmental legislation is the most complete set of environmental standards in the world. About 550 directives, regulations and decisions are improving living conditions, raising standards and decreasing pollutant emissions, with benefits for citizens and the environment.

The seed of change was planted in the 70s, when the first ministers of the Environment were created, and the first EU Environmental Action Program was launched. The 1987 Brundtland Report then made the first major attempt to present a way out of the modern ecological crisis that 25 years earlier, in 1962, had found a dramatic voice in Rachel Carson with his work "Silent Spring" and a first quantitative analysis 10 years later with the Meadows Report "The Limits to Growth". Rachel Carson, as well as the group of scholars of the Club of Rome, trusted in the conviction of the elites and world public opinion in a change of conscience that would have been the propelling force of the transformation towards a Sustainable Development.

Since 1992, the concept of Sustainable Development and climate change have received official recognition from the United Nations in the context of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Since then, the awareness of the need to manage environmental issues on a global scale and the need to eliminate poverty was identified as a prerequisite for the process of Sustainable Development, which, together with the climate change issue have never stopped interacting and influencing each other in the social development discourse. Climate changes started to modify the main natural and human life conditions and therefore the conditions for social and economic development. The need to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations would have allowed economic development to proceed in a sustainable way to make national and regional development paths less impactful. In particular, developing countries referred to the concept of Sustainable Development to highlight the gravity and increasing frequency of the impacts of climate changes affecting the poorest populations.



The experience of the UNFCCC became increasingly a point of reference for the negotiation processes during the UN Conferences and to understand the importance of the balance between human activity and the environment, as well as the severity of the impact of the socio-economic model of infinite growth on the natural world. Pursuing sustainable development became impossible without addressing the issues related to the increase in global temperature.

At the European level, the real turning point came in 1999, with the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty. The environmental protection became a constitutional principle of the EU, sanctioning its transversal integration into Community policies and activities, with the aim of promoting Sustainable Development. Two years later, during the Göteborg Summit in June 2001, EU leaders launched the first real EU strategy on Sustainable Development. The Göteborg Declaration had the merit of definitively inserting the environmental dimension as third pillar of the European policy into the process of Sustainable Development, that was to be added the first two pillars, social and economic, defined by the Lisbon Strategy. An ambitious call for a new approach to decision-making process for ensuring that EU economic, social and environmental policies were mutually reinforced. However, the failure of the Hague Conference testified a sign of the inability of governments to take on a problem with great economic implications, both for present generations and for future ones and more generally, there was a possible contradiction between the main objective of the Lisbon Strategy, that was to achieve an EU economic growth as strong as possible, and pursue Sustainable Development, which was given a marginal and imprecise qualification regarding the mechanisms of formation of political guidelines for its implementation.

In most developing countries, it was difficult to reconcile the need to reduce poverty without harming the environment. Although underdevelopment was one of the main causes of environmental damage, the environmental protection was considered a secondary end to the overcoming of social and economic inequalities. Therefore, it was not coincidence that in Johannesburg particular attention will be given to the issue of poverty reduction, where unfortunately, official documents and declarations signed, would remain empty proclamation of intent. Despite the fact that an incontrovertible cause of failure was the lack of a single approach between the financial, commercial, investment, technology and policy systems, based on short-term rather than long-term considerations, Johannesburg Conference aroused a sensitization of the world public opinion. The relaunching of the Lisbon Strategy was envisaged as a crucial political pattern in the construction of a european model of development and cohesion, which proposed the definitive integration between the Lisbon Strategy and the Göteborg Strategy.

The Lisbon Treaty innovated the process of community integration, providing greater opportunities for the implementation of the new Strategy which will be further renamed in 2010 with the name “Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” that would have outline a framework of the social market economy for the next decade, focusing on three priority areas: intelligent growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth.

Climate change was beginning to represent the biggest challenge of our time and its negative and irreversible impacts threatened the ability of all countries to achieve Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, at Rio+20 Conference, faded the last attempts to establish a sustainable economy based on a green model, due to the opposition of China and other poor and developing countries, resulting in a document that contained no concrete commitment. At the same time, a parallel process took place in the negotiations on the fight against climate change: Copenhagen COP15 failed in an attempt to replace the Kyoto Protocol - which had represented the first example of a legally binding global treaty in history - with a new legally binding treaty for the lowering of greenhouse emissions. If on the one hand economic growth, reinforced by globalization, had allowed several countries to reduce the level of poverty, others had witnessed a deterioration in socio-economic conditions, with an increase in income inequality and an incalculable environmental damage. The new post-Rio+20 and post-Copenhagen negotiations have set a different path based on goals and not on the means, therefore respectful of the differences between economies and levels of development, setting equal targets for all and leaving the individual countries to do their best but with the utmost transparency and any possible uniformity in making the results known. In a symmetrical way, the two processes had a common outcome in 2015; climate change has indeed played a crucial role in the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development, a blueprint approved by the UN on 25 September 2015, together with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), articulated in 169 targets and 240 indicators, to be reached by 2030. Agenda 2030 propose goals and challenges for all world governments in an indistinct way and in the slot of goal 13 of such Agenda was inserted in December 2015 the result of the Global Climate Agreement in Paris, which set the goal at the turn of the century to contain the increase in global average temperature below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels.

The historic global political Paris Agreement of 2015 represents an important watershed because it has sanctioned the definitive defeat of those who did not recognize climate change as real, giving a sense of urgency to the need to find a global response to Sustainable Development and climate change even if it does not provide for a legally binding value. Although the milestone reached, the continuous hypothesis of exit from the Paris agreement feared by the US president Trump and the recent election of Jair Bolsonaro on one side and, to some extent, the growing success of the European nationalist movements which could cause enormous risks for the identity and the very idea of the Union, are likely to jeopardizing those small but significant steps forward made on the political level.

Nowadays, the threats of the Anthropocene require complex answers, which in this vision can only arise from the strengthening of world governance. However, for many countries in the world, the link between the actions needed to tackle climate change and development priorities, including social and economic development and poverty eradication is a limitation. On the contrary, the EU has come a long way in terms of Sustainable Development, expressing a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, incorporating Sustainable Development into EU policies to ensure that economic, social and environmental challenges are jointly addressed. An approach based on the implementation of the SDGs

and the UN 2030 Agenda as a guiding principle in a shared commitment that requires the contribution and cooperation of member states governments and civil society. This awareness was a reason why the EU was instrumental in defining the global 2030 Agenda despite the significant critical issues that could be observed in it, which demonstrate the incompatibility between GDP-based economic growth and the urgent need to take concrete measures to combat climate change and protect the environment.

Given the above, on a global level, the path of Sustainable Development started thirty years ago with the Brundtland Report, does not yet have a sufficient step to achieve the Goals set for 2030. Natural resources are running out and biodiversity is losing at an alarming rate. Air pollution due to the high concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, urbanization and climate change remain a threat. Inequalities have increased everywhere, between countries and even within richer countries. The fight against extreme poverty is yielding results, but the general picture shows increasing inequity in the distribution of wealth and serious problems for employment, gender equality and the rights of the weakest.

In conclusion, humanity today faces an epoch-making challenge and these issues should be at the forefront of international and national political agendas as the task we are facing is not so much environmental as it is political since environmental problems do not respect national borders. Considering future risks, the immediate direction to take is that for which social, economic, environmental and institutional equity and social sustainability, become pillars to construct a new paradigm of human development that support the convergence and the integration of economic development, social development and environmental protection. These three dimensions cannot be considered independently as they are inseparable and co-essential to a path of overall sustainability.

The importance of concrete political choices within a universal reference framework for Sustainable Development is crucial and it is no longer sufficient to limit the action to *façade* operations given the risks indicated by the numerous scientific studies. There is a growing amount of evidence that it is impossible to think of continuing with scenarios like *business as usual*, but a profound change is required by all, institutions, companies and civil society that must be protagonists of change. The transition to the principles and practices of Sustainable Development is decisive for a sustainable human future as well as recognizing the limits of the planet we come from, on which we depend and without which we can not live, in the urgency of reversing the course of our patterns of infinite growth. To believe that there is no alternative is what reassures us but at the same time condemns us. We can provide a vision of a better future, the climate crisis might just give us an opportunity to create an healthier and more equitable world.

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