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DIFFERENT SCENARIOS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S AGENDA 2030

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Abstract: *This article examines the potential for implementation of Agenda 2030 in the EU. In the first part, the article outlines how the EU shifted and adapted its policy framework after the adoption of the Agenda 2030. In the second part, it analyzes the role of governance for the implementation of the Agenda and possible scenarios for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the EU. In the final part, the article examines scenarios for the future of the EU, as defined in the White Paper for the Future of Europe in 2017, concluding that comprehensive implementation of the Agenda is possible only under the scenario in which all EU member states do much more together, but with an important caveat.*

Keywords: *Agenda 2030; SDGs; EU; Governance*

INTRODUCTION

As a response to the Agenda 2030 adopted in September 2015, in 2016 the EU adopted a new sustainable development strategy "Next steps for a sustainable Europe's future". The new sustainable development strategy introduced a twofold strategy for implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the EU. The first task was to integrate the Agenda into all existing EU policies and Commission priorities, and then take stock of the current situation and identify the most concerning areas. A second track was to focus on the long-term implementation of the Agenda and include the development of the vision and policies after 2020. The Strategy also announced that the new Multi-annual Financial Framework beyond 2020 would reflect this commitment to achieving the SDGs (2016, 3). As a commitment to fulfill the Agenda goals in foreign and development policy, the consensus on the role of the EU in global development was renewed under the motto "Our world, our future, our dignity" (2016).

The new consensus on the role of the EU in global development (2016) focused on aligning the goals and priorities of EU development and foreign policy with the Agenda 2030. The Consensus from 2006, which followed the adoption of Millennium Goals, set the EU priorities within 8 Millennium goals: eradication of poverty, prevention of conflict and fragile states, human development, human rights (with emphasis on women, children and indigenous people), democracy, good governance, environmental sustainability and eradication of AIDS.

In the renewed Consensus key areas remained the same, while eradication of poverty was defined as the primary goal. The Consensus reaffirmed the EU commitment to the global development, but introduced new elements of the implementation of the EU development policy, as they were defined by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda in 2015, namely new financial instruments and multi-stakeholder partnership. Subsequently, as expressed in Commission's Publication "The EU Budget for the Future" (2018), the proposal of external action budget for 2021-2027 was increased by 30 % and it introduced a new instrument for development - Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) with €89.2 billion allocated (European Commission, 2018).

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STEPS FORWARD: SCENARIOS FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGENDA 2030

The success of implementing the Agenda 2030 in the EU depends on many factors, some of which are of institutional and systemic nature, others more intangible and within the realm of politics. The European Commission has published two important documents for the future of the Agenda 2030 in the EU; Reflection Paper on the Future of Europe (2017) and "Towards Sustainable Europe by 2030" (2019), which deals with the Agenda more directly.

Three Scenarios for the Implementation of Agenda 2030

The Commission's Reflection Paper: "Towards Sustainable Europe by 2030" (2019) outlined three possible scenarios for implementation of the Agenda 2030. Scenario 1 envisioned an overarching EU Strategy for SDGs, mandatory for all member states. This would entail a very high level of coordination between EU level and member states, but also horizontally, between member states (2019, 34).

Scenario 2 would maintain the *status quo* when it comes to implementing the Agenda 2030 in EU, with mainstreaming of the SDGs in all relevant EU policies, but without the Agenda becoming and obligation to member states. In practice, this scenario relies heavily on the European Semester process as a mechanism of policy coordination and implementation monitoring. The SDGs would serve as an inspiration to both EU and member states' policies, especially in areas such as research and innovation, employment and social inclusion, climate and energy, farming and food production and cohesion policy (2019, 36).

Scenario 3 calls for more focus on external action and helping the rest of the world to catch-up to the EU standards while maintaining the current level of Agenda implementation within the EU. The primary instrument in this scenario is building and developing partnerships with various stakeholders – multilateral organizations, the private sector, non-governmental sector and national states (2019, 38).

Governance for Implementing the SDGs in the EU

Examining the role of governance for the implementation of SDGs, Biermann et al (2014) concluded that three aspects of governance need to be considered: good governance (pertaining to decision-making processes and institutional setting), effective governance (the capacity of a country to implement the SDGs and equitable governance (distributive effects of policies). These aspects of government have to be integrated with SDGs in general, but also when planning the implementation of every separate goal or target.

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An interesting approach to the implementation of the SDGs was given by Meuleman and Niestroy (2016). They introduced the principle of "Common But Differentiated Governance" (CBDG), which includes 'metagovernance' (combining different governance styles into successful governance frameworks), combined with key governance principles, as a mechanism to support the implementation of SDGs.

Kamphof (2018) analyzed the effect of different arguments in regards to the implementation of the SDGs in EU, including 'intergovernmentalism vs. supranationalism', socialization mechanism, preference heterogeneity and the EU's position in the international arena. None of these arguments appeared to have a crucial effect on the implementation of the SDGs, while one other political argument stood out as the most influential – political will (or absence of it).

The author concluded that legally defined powers could enable EU and Members States to implement the SDGs, but that this is hindered by the element of political will. Staford-Smith et al. (2017) demonstrated that the SDGs implementation requires more attention to the interlinkages across three dimensions: sectors, societal actors and among low, medium and high-income countries. Further, drawing on a global sustainability science and practice perspective, they offered seven recommendations to improve these interlinkages: finance, technology, capacity building, trade, policy coherence, partnerships, and data monitoring and accountability.

Hackenesch et al concluded that linking ongoing European strategies (The EU Global Strategy and the revision of Europe 2020 Strategy with approach beyond 2020) to the Agenda 2030 would contribute to creating more coherent policies. Therefore, they recommend that these two strategies serve as umbrella documents for the domestic and external implementation of the Agenda 2030, linking both dimensions.

Gregersen, Mackie, and Torres (2016) emphasized the role of political leadership at the EU level for implementing the SDGs, especially considering the universality of the goals. Pisano et al. (2015) analyzed the role of the EU in SDGs implementation and offered a list of recommendations for its role in steering the implementation: 1) Be an 'added value' rather than 'added bureaucracy', and be a mediator between global process and Europe and *vice versa*, to show a future-oriented leadership (i.e. decent jobs, innovation, social inclusion, cohesion among members, etc.) sharing best practices; 2) EU semester as a tool for implementing SDGs (+ show-casing); 3) Positive cherry picking (it's hard to communicate the huge quantity of goals and targets. EU should start key main dynamics); 4) Governance structures in a multi-level, multi-structural, multi-regional system; 5) More democratic, participatory approaches; 6) Facilitating, coordinating polycentric SD implementation; 7) Integrated approach through policy coherence and efficiency in three levels: Political, in between EU policies, in between existing mechanisms/indicators; 8) Coordination and dialogue among different stakeholders; 9) EU needs to have a guiding role: translate global

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goals into EU/National ones: Coordination task for European Commission Vice-president and use monitoring process of the European Semester to scrutinize for SDG implementation use; 10) EU needs a mechanism to implement SDGs: possibility is Europe 2020+ (2015, 57).

Based on the above-mentioned approaches, the article extracts three fundamental elements of governance for SDGs in EU - political will from all Member States to act jointly, strong EU leadership and an integrated approach to governance. In the following chapter, the article will analyze how each of the scenarios set in the Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe (2017) facilitates or hinders those elements and, thus, facilitates or hinders the implementation of the SDGs.

DIFFERENT SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The Commission's Reflection Paper on the Future of Europe outlines five possible scenarios for the future institutional and political structure of the EU. Each of those scenarios brings about a different vision of the future of Agenda 2030 in the EU.

Scenario 1: Carrying on in the Current Institutional Setting

In this scenario, the EU sticks to its course and focuses on implementing and upgrading its current reform agenda. The speed of decision-making depends on overcoming differences of views to deliver on collective long-term priorities (2017,16).

The paper emphasized that pros for this scenario include the fact that it guarantees the unity of the EU will be preserved and citizens' rights derived from the EU law upheld while maintaining a reasonable level of policy success. On the other hand, major disputes would still threat the EU unity and there would have to exist strong collective will to jointly do things by all actors involved (2017, 16). The EU Parliament study (2016) examined the governance frameworks put in place for SDG implementation in all EU Member States, and it showed that the EU Member States are integrating SDGs into national strategies, but that there is a need for better mainstreaming of sustainability. This demonstrates that more prominent role of the EU and its leadership is required for the comprehensive implementation of the SDGs. The first scenario doesn't allow for much stronger EU leadership, as it envisions 'status quo' when it comes to an institutional setting. The political will of Member States to act jointly is currently also not on a satisfactory level. The EU strategy for implementing the SDGs does include integrative approach, especially in terms of policy coherence and multi-stakeholder involvement. Following the first scenario in the future would allow for an uneven success when it comes to implementation of the SDGs. It would certainly make possible for the most of the Agenda targets to be addressed (yet, not all of them), albeit with questionable effect (those that fall within the EU competencies would have better success).

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Scenario 2: Nothing but the Single Market

This scenario focuses on deepening the common market mechanism, but there is no common policy on crucial issues, such as migration, security or defense, but also all other policy domains outside single market (2017, 18). The pro for this scenario is that it would make decision-making much simpler, but it would also limit the capacity of EU Member States to act collectively. Also, citizens' rights would eventually become very restricted (2017, 18). As the pros and cons in the Commission paper stated, under this scenario Member States would have very limited capacity to act collectively, therefore it would only allow for the very limited role of the EU leadership in implementation of the SDGs. The political will of the Member States might be on a high level when it comes to the single market policy, but this scenario would make the political motivation for joint action in all other policy areas completely redundant. The scenario would allow for an integrated approach only in policies on the single market. Therefore, the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the EU under this scenario would be very limited.

Scenario 3: Those Who Want More Do More

In this scenario, known as 'multi-speed Europe', the EU proceeds as today but allows for the Member States that want to do more in common, to join the "coalitions of the willing" to work together in specific policy areas. The status of other Member States is preserved, and they retain the possibility to join those doing more over time (2017, 20).

Pro for this scenario is that the unity of the EU would be preserved under this scenario, while further cooperation is made possible for those who want. However, citizens' rights derived from EU law would start to vary depending on whether they live in a country that has chosen to do more. Also, it would make transparency and accountability of the different layers of decision-making hard to obtain (2017, 20).

The scenario gives the EU much more power in certain areas which the Member States agree on as priorities. This entails strong EU leadership and political will, but only in a limited number of policies and by a limited number of Member States. The integrative approach could also be applied modestly.

This scenario would, therefore, allow for the implementation of the SDGs in the measure in which (a group of) the Member States choose parts of them as a priority. Given the universality of the SDGs, it would neither guarantee their comprehensive implementation in terms of the content, nor terms of their implementation in the EU as a whole.

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Scenario 4: Doing Less More Efficiently

In this scenario, the member states agree to better tackle certain priorities together, and the EU decides to focus on fewer policy areas. For these policies, the EU is given a stronger role to directly enforce collective decisions. In other policy areas, the EU either stops acting or is doing much less (2017, 22).

The pro for this scenario is that it would divide responsibilities much clearer, which would help citizens to better understand who handles what. Citizens' rights would depend on which areas are chosen as priorities to focus on. The major con for this scenario is that the EU has many difficulties to agree on the areas to prioritize (2017, 22).

Similarly to the previous scenario, doing less more efficiently would entail more effective EU leadership and political will of Member States to act jointly, but in fewer areas than necessary to implement the Agenda 2030 comprehensively. It would, however, allow for a more efficient integrative approach to governance.

Doing less more effectively could bring substantial progress in areas that are agreed as priorities (e.g. climate change or poverty). However, these areas would have to be agreed as priorities by all member states and it still wouldn't allow for the universal implementation of the SDGs.

Scenario 5: Doing Much More Together

The final scenario is the most optimistic one, as it supposes that there is a consensus among the Member States to extend the cooperation within the EU further than ever before in all domains. Decisions would be agreed faster at European level and rapidly enforced (2017, 24).

The pro for this scenario is that it would allow for far greater and quicker decision-making at EU level. Also, citizens would have more rights derived directly from EU law. On the other hand, this scenario carries a risk of alienating citizens who do not agree for so much power to be allocated to the EU level (2017, 24).

The scenario of doing much more together is the only scenario that would allow for a comprehensive implementation of the SDGs. However, it is extremely difficult to expect that this scenario would be the one chosen by the Member States in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, for it to be viable, it would have to be not only the result of the consensus of all Member States but also the reflection of the sentiments of the large parts of the societies within the Member States. In other words, it would foster all three elements of governance for SDGs, but only up to a measure in which, not only Member States but also EU citizens accept the legitimacy of EU institutions to act in a vast number of policies.

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CONCLUSION

The EU was actively engaged in the process of negotiating and adopting seventeen goals of the Agenda 2030 and has since committed to being a global front-runner in its implementation. Many of the elements of the Agenda's goals are enshrined into the EU policies, some of which long before the adoption of the Agenda, at least since the adoption of the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development (2001). Furthermore, after the Agenda was adopted, the EU has aligned its sustainability policy to the SDGs, by adopting a new strategy for sustainable development in 2016, while Member States' leaders and EU institutions reiterated and invigorated their commitment to promoting and aiding the implementation of the SDGs worldwide. Likewise, the European Commission has developed several new mechanisms for facilitating the Agenda's implementation and for tracking its progress. The Eurostat, for instance, publishes annual progress reports on Agenda's implementation since 2017, based on the set of indicators developed on the bases of the SDG's indicators and indicators from the existing EU policies and strategies, such as the Europe 2020 and the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Commission has, also, set up a Multi-stakeholder platform for SDGs, as an advisory and support mechanism for their implementation.

However, as the EU is a union of European national states, the potential for its implementation largely depends on the efforts and political will of those states. Furthermore, some of the goals are impossible to achieve on the national level, which means that their implementation might rely on the future level and scope of the EU integration and its institutional arrangements. It is, thus, hard to imagine that the efforts to stop or slow climate change could be successful unless all Member States contribute. This article examined various policy frameworks and EU institutional settings and evaluated their impact on the implementation of the Agenda 2030, concluding that only stronger EU integration allows for a comprehensive implementation of the Agenda 2030. However, this scenario is too optimistic, especially by 2030. The current political climate in the EU is far from favorable for deepening the unification and transferring more power to the EU level. Furthermore, in the long run, it carries certain risks as it could potentially lead to alienation of a large number of EU citizens should question the legitimacy of the EU to gain more power. This could potentially have detrimental consequences for unity and long-term survival of the EU. It would, therefore, be more realistic and prudent to maintain the *status quo* when it comes to institutional setting and focus on alternative ways of strengthening the role of EU leadership and political will of Member States to act jointly on implementation of the Agenda 2030. At the same time, the EU has to further develop the instruments for policy coherence and effectiveness, such as Better Regulation Agenda (see: Renda, 2017) and follow an integrative approach to governance on all levels and across all policy sectors (Monkelbaan, 2018).

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These practices and innovative institutional solutions designed to foster cooperation and build consensus on important issues on one side, while improving policy coherence and effectiveness on the other, might be the best chance the EU has to fully achieve seventeen goals of the Agenda by 2030. 

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