

PRAGUE INITIATIVE FOR THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Ten years have passed since the UN Conference on the Environment and Development. This period has been marked by a number of significant political, economic and social changes in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (the countries of the Visegrad group). In terms of the environment, the region has made evident progress regarding the efficient use of natural resources, a decrease in emissions and the preparation of an institutional and legal framework.

Nevertheless, as far as sustainable development is concerned, the achievements of the countries of the Visegrad group – as is the case with the rest of the world – are far from satisfactory. The countries of the Visegrad group share a responsibility for the future development of the planet Earth, and wish to actively contribute to the global efforts being made to enforce the ideas of sustainable development. The Prague Initiative promotes positive change in the broader international framework.

We, the participants of the “Visegrad Agenda 21” Conference, which was held in Prague in April 4 – 6, 2002,

- being concerned about the lax approach of the international community towards the implementation of sustainability principles,
- considering that changes in human values, awareness and education are the main driving forces for changes in behaviour,
- being convinced about the necessity to change our lifestyle, notably our production and consumption patterns,
- bearing in mind that human welfare is a much larger concept than material consumption,
- being aware that to reach sustainability, an inter-sectoral, multidisciplinary approach is needed,
- affirming the right of each, even unborn, human being to a healthy environment,
- considering that the protection and strengthening of planet Earth’s life support systems is the most important goal for mankind and is a framework for our current and future development,
- being aware that the consumption of natural resources in our countries is beyond the threshold of sustainability,
- considering that sustainability, particularly global social equity and sustainable production and consumption, is the key element in the North-South relationships, and
- being aware that the globalisation process and its results represent a challenge which requires co-ordinated action,

we propose the following:

On a global level

1. With regard to natural resources and pollution, to share the Earth’s carrying capacity fairly between generations and peoples. To respect the same approach on regional, national and local levels.
2. To introduce sustainability impact assessment as a tool on each level of the decision-making process, including planning processes and financial decisions in view of the fact that the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development are indivisible from each other.

3. To strengthen the endeavour of governments to implement international environmental conventions and agreements as a first step towards a new global ethics of sustainability.
4. To introduce enforcement, compliance and mediation mechanisms in international environmental law, and to set up an international environmental tribunal to handle the violation of environmental laws and to ensure strict liability for environmental damage.
5. To insist on the compliance of transnational corporations with rules of corporate accountability in environmental, social, cultural and economic fields in all countries of their operation.
6. To share the costs of protecting and preserving global environmental services, as we share the benefits more equitably.
7. To call upon countries with the biggest impact on the global environment to assume special responsibility for the Earth.
8. To implement measures to stabilise the global economy and its capital flows (Tobin tax, capital reserve systems, etc.) to avoid monetary, financial and economic crises, as seen in the second half of the 1990s.
9. To remind developed countries about their commitments to provide official development assistance (0.7 % of GDP) at the minimum level agreed upon at the 1992 UN Conference on the Environment and Development and to publish the relevant data on a regular basis.
10. To introduce integrated resource management (to prevent the landscape drying, to restore the hydrological cycle on the continents and to prevent the misuse of cultivated land as a source of food production).

On the level of countries of the Visegrad group

11. To strengthen the position of sustainable development in the Visegrad political agenda.
12. To maintain and further develop the positive aspects of the Visegrad group's recent conditions throughout the entire EU accession process – for example, public transport, less harmful traditional agriculture, traditional skills, more modest consumption patterns, and a rich diversity of the natural and cultural heritage.
13. To introduce an environmental, revenue-neutral fiscal reform as a primary economic tool for transition towards sustainability based on the internalisation of negative external costs.
14. To advocate an additional 10% tax shift from labour to natural resources within 10 years.
15. To support increased efficiency through cleaner production, and to reinvest saved funds into natural and human resources.
16. To develop a healthy and transparent market environment by eliminating environmentally adverse subsidies, especially in the energy and transport sectors, by 2010 (and identifying them by 2005).

17. To promote market-oriented instruments in the protection of the environment, such as voluntary agreements or emission trading.
18. To introduce quantitative targets and regular assessment of the progress made towards sustainability utilising sustainable development indicators.
19. To encourage co-operation in the framework of natural units such as the Carpathians and the Danube river basin, as well as cross-boundary co-operation in the framework of river basins like Morava, Odra, Poprad, Tisa or Ipeľ.
20. To strengthen independence from external resources at a regional level, particularly in agricultural and energy production.
21. To increase the share of renewable resources in energy production by a minimum of 10% by 2010 and promote energy savings.
22. To recognise the importance of regional development leading to a reduction in regional disparities, the creation of job opportunities promoting sustainable development and an increase in eco-efficiency. To use EU structural and cohesion funds assigned to the countries of the Visegrad group as a way of promoting sustainable development on a regional level.
23. To reform educational systems focusing on commonly understood principles of sustainable development and necessary abilities (such as critical and systematic thinking, problem solving, co-operation, responsible decision-making).
24. To call upon churches and other moral authorities to contribute to the building of a value system compatible with sustainability principles.
25. To strengthen multi-sectoral, cross-border partnerships among NGOs, academic institutions, the business sector and municipalities at a local level for the implementation of Agenda 21. To extend networks and improve the exchange of information regarding good examples of Agenda 21 implementation.
26. To take an active part in international research network benchmarking and the best practices in sustainable development.

Apart from the above-mentioned principles and approaches we also consider the following important:

27. To support local civic action groups, community partnerships and co-operative approaches in order to strengthen civil society. To support access to information and public participation in decision making by means of clear legal rules and proper training of officials and by developing opportunities for the public to participate in the decision-making process.
28. To change educational approaches and ways of disseminating information by focusing on teaching sustainable lifestyles, prudent consumption (a decrease in the consumption of animal products, for example, would have very positive and wide-ranging effects) and a respect for all forms of life. To focus governmental policies and programmes of sustainability education on training the relevant stakeholders, i.e. teachers/trainers/civil servant/priests/NGOs activists/journalists, etc.

29. To support the recovery of the countryside by restructuring existing job opportunities, creating new jobs, introducing locally adequate technologies and developing environmentally, socially and economically acceptable infrastructure. Land use planning and linear infrastructure should not lead to the further fragmentation of natural and agricultural units.
30. To take specific legal and financial insurance measures to stop urban sprawl and to use old industrial and other abandoned sites (brownfields) for new development, as well as increasing the proportion of urban green areas.

We, the authors of the Prague Initiative, are prepared to contribute to the implementation of the above-mentioned goals.

Prague, April 6th 2002

List of signatories is attached in Annex A:

List of Signatories			
	Name	Institution	State
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