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Charter for the Future – Impulses for Sustainability Policy in Germany

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Bonn, 2 December 2014. In the year 2015, there will be two political processes that are fundamental with regard to sustainability policy in Germany: The further development of the German Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNE) and the adoption of the post-2015 Agenda by the United Nations (UN), which will contain universal goals for sustainable development for all UN Member States.

The Charter for the Future – presented last week by the German Development Minister, Gerd Müller – is an important element in these processes. It is a beacon project as part of the SNE with the explicit task of supporting its further development. It focuses on sustainable development worldwide: Firstly, it lists political and practical initiatives by means of which Germany can facilitate and support change in developing countries. Secondly, it names changes within Germany itself – such as the energy transition (or in German: *Energiewende*) or sustainable consumption – which can contribute towards solving global problem situations. Thirdly, it emphasises that German politics has to become more engaged internationally in order to achieve these objectives.

The SNE has 21 action areas and 38 indicators. The international dimension of sustainable development features in only four of these action areas. This is not appropriate for a country that – unlike any other – is so heavily intertwined internationally (as stated by Foreign Minister Steinmeier on 27 November 2014 at the Economic Summit of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*).

The Charter for the Future starts by stating the political goals through which German policies should assume international responsibility for the future and which would consequently need to feature in an updated SNE, also with indicators. These include, for example, the strengthening and the expansion of international cooperation in environmental protection; compliance with the financial commitments made as part of agreements to protect climate and biodiversity; the alignment of public procurement with social and environmental criteria; bilateral and multilateral economic, trade and investment agreements, “that support sustainable growth, respect human rights and protect the environment” (Charter for the Future, p. 27); the strengthening and intensification of human rights-based approaches in all aspects of German international cooperation.

It is a pity that the Charter for the Future failed in some areas to make more precise statements – for

example, with regard to the need for the middle classes around the world either to reduce their meat consumption (in Germany and other industrialised countries) or at least not permit it to increase too greatly (in developing countries) in order to ensure global food security without endangering forests, wetlands and biodiversity. Clearer language on reducing global waste streams would also have been good.

The Charter for the Future stresses that “greater economic power should always bring with it more responsibility” (S. 26). This pertains to industrialised countries just as much as to rising powers and the private sector in general: “Germany must also work both at home and abroad to achieve global compliance with social and environmental standards, human rights enforcement and respect for environmental legislation and international labour standards. At national and international levels, the public sector should engage with the private to ensure compliance with applicable rules, regulations and standards across all production facilities and entire value chains.” (S. 26). One possible indicator here could be the share of businesses that adhere to certification programmes such as the *Deutscher Nachhaltigkeitskodex* or the *Global Reporting Initiative*.

Finally, the Charter for the Future specifies two important instruments for achieving its goals and continually improving its strategies and measures: Firstly, multi-stakeholder partnerships, to which companies, civil society, politics and science can contribute their various resources. Secondly, the UN review process, which from 2016 onward will be used to scrutinise whether the national targets of UN Member States are adequate and appropriate for implementing the post-2015 agenda. Through early participation in the 2016 review process, Germany would distinguish itself as a pioneer and benefit from comparison with others, as well as from the recommendations, allowing it to achieve its own goals faster and more efficiently.

With regard to the global impacts of German policies, the Charter for the Future offers important impulses for updating the SNE. The post-2015 agenda will provide further impulses – we just do not yet know how wide-ranging and challenging these will be. The Strategy for Sustainable Development, however, should by no means lag behind the objectives of the Charter for the Future.