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International conference: “National parks in Turkmenistan”

Transboundary cooperation as a supportive tool for sustainable development policies

The distances that separate the different communities of the world seem to be constantly shrinking. When looking on their neighbours, communities more and more get aware of the specific ecological, economic and socio-cultural assets of their own; but these various communities also get more and more aware of their common interests: Individual challenges with respect to sustainable development targets are in essence of a similar nature. It is for the individual communities and territorial entities then to gain synergies by co-operating on these fields of common interests; it is up to them to translate commonly valuable guidelines and experiences in line with their specific needs on the national or regional levels. Communities are well advised to use the whole potential as well of opportunities for an efficient and effective cooperation as of pertinent synergies: The most supportive tool to this end is to develop and to take care of relevant transboundary partnerships in a spirit of mutual trust and shared responsibility.

1. Protecting the “Edelweiss” - Warranting “sustainable quality of life”

1.1 Development of spheres of interest

Looking back about a time span of a hundred years, in Europe the following environment themes came up and dominated - one after another - the last decades :

- Till 1960: Conservation of fauna and flora species –
Protection of species;
- 1960 – 1980: Conservation of Ecosystems and landscapes –
Protection of ecosystems;

- since 1980 – : Combat against pollution of air, water, ... - *Protection of the environment*;
- Rio 1992: Environment and *Development*;
- Johannesburg 2002: *Sustainable Development*.

1.2 Organisations and their “products”

Organisations involved and environmental treaties agreed are:

a) in the field of species and ecosystems protection:

- UNEP; Council of Europe, IUCN
- UN-Ramsar Convention 1971; UN-Washington Convention 1973; UN-Bonn Convention 1979; CoE-Bern Convention 1979;

b) in the field of environment protection:

- Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe; Regional Environment Centres (REC`s);
- UN/ECE-Geneva Convention and respective protocols, 1979, ...; UN-Vienna Convention and Montreal Protocol, 1987, UN-Bale Convention 1989, UN/ECE Espoo Convention, 1991; Alpine Convention 1991;

c) in the field of environment and development:

- UN- Rio; UN-CSD; UN-ECE; FAO,...;
- Rio-Process; UN-Climate Convention, 1992; UN-Biodiversity Convention, 1992; UN-Convention on Desertification, 1994; UN-Rotterdam Convention, 1998; UN-Stockholm Convention, 2001; UN-ECE-Convention on Watercourses and lakes, 1998; UN-ECE Aarhus Convention 2000;

d) in the field of sustainable development:

- UN –Rio+10; UN-CSD; UN-ECE; FAO,...;
- International initiatives in the field of ecological, economic and socio-cultural development – symbiosis of the humanitarian, environmental and development domains with the aim
 - to develop potentials by means of exchanging experience and mobilizing resources;
 - to foster a common, but differentiated responsibility;
 - to develop networks on (global, regional and local level).

2. The context of sustainable development policies

2.1 The essence of “sustainability”

„Sustainable development,, - subject of continuing discussions for two reasons: There is a

- Lack of unanimity on the objective conceptual content;
- lack of sufficient objectivizable technical provability.

The conclusion of the dispute is different depending on the importance or rating which at a time is given to the ecological, the economic and the socio-cultural aspects of sustainable development.

2.2. Common Challenges

Sustainable development assumes an equal treatment of the needs of the present as well as of the future generations. Consequently two questions remain to be answered:

- Which needs of the present generation may be satisfied without harming future generations?
- How resources should be distributed within one generation among the different nations, regions, local communities, or sections of the population?

The concept of „sustainability“ comprises such ethical basic attitudes as public spirit, accessibility of resources, equality of chances and fairness of distributions. Therefore, sustainable development

- can not be defined by scientifically established indicators;
- has to be determined as a commonly agreed goal.

Communities will not get around coming to an agreement as to

- which development they believe to require in the future;
- which development they think to be able to cope with in the long term;
- which development they are prepared to afford themselves, while maintaining the goal of sustainable quality of life.

While striving for sustainable development, individual communities are continually confronted with interdependencies with neighbouring communities: Commonly recognised sustainability challenges require more and more commonly accepted sustainability goals – on regional, on continental and on global level.

2.3 Common Perspectives

Each community continually has to face conflicting sustainability goals between

- the preferences pursued today in practice on the one hand and the preferences theoretically demanded for tomorrow on the other hand;
- the practises pursued inside community borders on the one hand and the trans-boundary expectancies expressed by neighbouring communities on the other hand.

Conflicting sustainability goals lead to constraints of action: The forward-looking perspective for the rational treatment of these constraints of action can only be to commonly

- define in an integral, participative and democratic procedure, then
- to accept, and finally
- to respect in the long run ecological, economic and socio-cultural borderlines .

2.4 Common Strategies

While drawing these borderlines for a sustainable development, the common strategy for the communities involved must be, to lay down binding goals as regards quality standards as well as procedures for future acts and omissions – be this on local, regional, trans-boundary or global level.

The efficiency and effectiveness of these acts or omissions without any doubt reach their highest level,

- where comparatively there is the highest potential risk of harmful effects to a system
- or in other words
- where a system reacts in the comparatively most sensitive way to external stimuli.

A system undoubtedly reacts the more sensitively, the more unstable it is because of the dispositions, which are inherent to it or because of the given local situation. For example, speaking about nature protection needs, the following systems ought to be identified as particularly sensitive ones: Systems, which

- contain irretrievable values or potentials for the future;
- require an especially careful treatment during envisaged interventions because of the disadvantages of the site;
- require particular care when changes of their utilization either take place in a sudden and abrupt way or in a lingering and long-lasting way and leave no room for manoeuvre.

Sensitivity is related to effects which are caused by human beings. Thus, the designation of a system as particularly sensitive is a declaration of a community's will – it is a consensus of the community which, as would be most welcome and should be the case whenever possible, has been reached on an objective - or in the best of all cases – on a scientific basis.

3. Preconditions of transboundary cooperation

Going to engage in transboundary cooperation, a community has to analyse its starting position, e.g.:

- Quality of bi- or multilateral relations;
- ethnical or linguistic sensitivities;
- political limitations;
- subjects triggering a transboundary interest or affliction;
- subjects suited for a multilateral cooperation;
- actual need and potential for a cooperation on different levels;
- actual state (of affairs) and desired values;
- strategic targets and respective horizon for differentiated responses;
- character of transboundary responses;
- priorities defining implementation measures;
- measures to be implemented in a short-, middle- or long-term perspective;
- measures interfering with a sustainable development or provoking an undesirable development;
- measures provoking in all probability with low risk as fast as possible positive ecological, economic and socio-cultural effects or measures triggering a favourable development.

4. Backbones of a successful transboundary cooperation

The avoidance principle, the precautionary principle, the polluter-pays principle and the cooperation principle together – all embedded in a spirit of solidarity - form the backbone of transboundary agreements – agreements, which are based on the overruling principle of common, but differentiated responsibility.

Transboundary agreements have

- to respect as well the ecological, economic and socio-cultural starting point as sustainable development targets in the sense of borderlines;
- to respect all involved interests in a balanced way;

- to be sufficiently reasonable, calculable and implementable.

All partners of a transboundary cooperation agreement have to contribute to the self determined, concerted development process: According their respective capacities they have to bring in their individual basket of experiences and resources – resources earmarked for supporting a mutual sustainable development and strengthening mutual capacities; by doing this all partners have to be ready to make their fair and adequate contributions to sustainable development also outside their national borders.

5. Which role to play for Liechtenstein?

Speaking about sustainable development, substantive progress at the national and international level can be observed. However, daily we are confronted with media reports regarding poverty, insufficient access to vital resources, unemployment, soil degradation and growing risks as a consequence of more frequent natural hazards.

In the last years we have identified these human activities, which affect the ecological balance. We have found ways and means to implement measures aiming at sustainable development. What is needed now is to make progress with decisive and clearly targeted steps. The Government of Liechtenstein is ready to shoulder its part of this common responsibility for the integrity of the global environment, sustainable development and peace.

As a small alpine country Liechtenstein is highly vulnerable to harmful effects of natural hazards. So, by tradition, Liechtenstein is especially aware of the need for sustainable management practises. Therefore, in a constructive spirit Liechtenstein is a contracting party of all major conventions in the context of sustainable development. Being continually active in the respective processes or partnerships in a spirit of solidarity, Liechtenstein will continue to bring in its experience and to make its contribution.