Subnational agents in global governance for sustainable development?

Exploring routes for Flanders to the UN CSD

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ABSTRACT

Global governance for sustainable development (SD) is characterized by the need to involve various actors and agents at all levels, from the global to the local (UNCED, 1992b). Relatively little research is done on the role of subnational governments, which are considered to be especially important because of their responsibility for the implementation of SD policies (Berger and Pohoryles, 2004). Subnational governments are, however, not recognized as decision-making actors in global multilateral organizations, where a significant part of the policy debate on SD takes place. Without direct representation, they need to find other ways to exert agency in global governance for SD. This paper focuses on how Flanders, one of the Belgian subnational entities, tries to be part of the multilateral decision-making process for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). We adopt a Multi-Level Governance (MLG) perspective (Hooghe and Marks, 2001) in order to conceptually interpret the research topic, by studying the multi-level and the governance characteristics of the process. Analyzing the role of the Flemish government in this process implies that not only the subnational and the global level, but also the national and the regional (i.e. the EU) levels have to be taken into account. In addition, starting from MLG a typology can be developed (Geeraerts *et al.*, 2004) with four routes the Flemish government has at its disposal to be involved in CSD decision-making; i.e. the *multi-level*, the *European*, the *national* and the *direct* route. Particular attention is paid to how the Flemish government used these four routes to exercise agency in the most recent CSD cycle (2008-2009). Besides literature study, the paper is based on interviews with Flemish, Belgian, EU and UN officials and on non-participatory observation. As a member of the official delegation of the Belgian government, the author observed the entire decision-making process from the inside at every single level. This gives original insights and insides into the process.

Introduction

Since the publication of the Brundtland report by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, the concept of sustainable development has gained importance. In the beginning of the 90s, the focus shifted from defining the concept to shaping policies in order to achieve sustainable development worldwide. That policy shaping process received an important impulse from the United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Conference in 1992) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Summit in 2002) (Bruyninckx, 2006). However, the debate on sustainable development did not only take place in policy circles, but also in academic discourse. In that context the debate on *governance for sustainable development* arose (Kemp *et al.*, 2005; Lafferty, 2004). According to Meadowcroft, it refers to "processes of socio-political governance oriented towards the attainment of sustainable development" and encompasses "public debate, political decision-making, policy formation and implementation, and complex interactions among public authorities, private business and civil society" (Meadowcroft, 2008, p. 107). In academic literature much research has been conducted on governance for sustainable development (e.g. Bressers and Rosenbaum, 2003; Lafferty, 2004; Meadowcroft, 2008). However, only a few authors have focused on the significance of subnational governments[1] (e.g. Baker and Eckerberg, 2008; Clement, 2005; Lafferty and Narodoslawsky, 2003) and still less on the agency they can exert in decision-making for sustainable development. The involvement of subnational governments is considered to be important, because of their role in the implementation of sustainable development policy and because of their proximity to citizens and stakeholders (Baker *et al.*, 1997: 99; Berger and Pohoryles, 2004: 8).

When examining the role of subnational governments in decision-making for sustainable development, multilateral organizations, such as the UN, cannot be ignored. A significant part of decision-making for sustainable development takes place in those organizations. Concretely, they play an important role in, e.g. agenda-setting, the formulation of global sustainable development goals and for information-sharing on policy instruments and best practices. Since subnational entities are not recognized as decision-making actors in those multilateral settings and, consequently, have no direct representation, they need to find other ways if they want to be involved.

This paper focuses on the ways, hereafter called *routes*, chosen by subnational governments to be involved in multilateral decision-making for sustainable development. It aims to answer

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[1] A subnational entity is defined as a "coherent territorial entity situated between local and national levels" and its government as the "set of legislative and executive institutions responsible for authoritative decision-making" (Marks *et al.*, 2008: 113).

the following research question[2]: which routes can and does the Flemish subnational government use to be part of the decision-making process for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)? At the global level, the focus is on the CSD since that Commission is not only the single worldwide forum for sustainable development, but is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the outcome documents of the Rio Conference and the Johannesburg Summit (Chasek, 2000). Particular attention is paid to the last CSD cycle: CSD-16 (2008) and CSD-17 (2009).[3] The Flemish government is an interesting case because of its legislative powers and because of the specific institutional context of the Belgian federal state. Since Flanders is a subnational entity of an EU Member State, not only the subnational and the global level, but also the national and the regional (e.g. the EU) levels have to be taken into account.[4] Studying the role of the Flemish government in CSD decision-making thus also delivers data on the role of Flanders in the EU decision-making process on the CSD. That can be very interesting, especially given the upcoming Belgian Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2010.

The first section of this paper analyzes how decision-making for sustainable development can be approached from a Multi-Level Governance (MLG) perspective. That perspective is adopted to conceptually interpret the research question and to develop a framework for analyzing it. Next, the paper briefly discusses the origin of the CSD and its decision-making setting. In a third section, a typology of four routes that subnational governments can use to be involved in multilateral decision-making is developed. The fourth section consists of an empirical analysis of how the Flemish government can and has used each of the four routes to exert agency in CSD decision-making.

Besides literature study, the paper is based on interviews[5] with officials and non-governmental actors and on a non-participatory observation which took place from January 2008 until September 2009. As a member of the official delegation of the Flemish government[6], the author observed the entire decision-making process from the inside at every single level, i.e. the subnational (Flanders), the national (Belgium), the regional (EU and UN Economic Commission for Europe: UNECE) and the global level (UN).

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[2] This research is part of a Ph.D. research on the Flemish subnational government in multilateral decision-making for sustainable development that is funded by the Flemish Policy Research Centre for Sustainable Development (www.steunpuntDO.be).

[3] This paper builds upon previous research conducted with regard to CSD-16 (Van den Brande, 2009).

[4] In order to avoid confusion, the use of the notion 'subnational' is opted for to point at the level immediately below the nation-state. The notion 'regional' indicates the level immediately above the nation-state. The latter includes, for example, the EU and the regional commissions of the UN ECOSOC, such as the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The term 'international' is used when referring to both the regional and the global level.

[5] An overview of the conducted interviews can be found at the end of this paper.

[6] The author would like to thank all members of the Belgian delegation, the Flemish delegation in particular, for their cooperation to this research.

1. Sustainable development and Multi-Level Governance

The last twenty-five years, the debate on governance received much attention in the academic literature. Many authors used the term to indicate a changed way of governing. According to Rhodes, for example, "governance signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a *new* process of governing; or a *changed* condition or ordered rule; or the *new* method by which society is governed" (Rhodes, 1996: 652-653). The concept is defined in many different ways. Marks and Hooghe, for example, define governance as "binding decision making in the public sphere" (Marks and Hooghe, 2005: 15). In general, authors agree, however, on blurring boundaries between and within public and private sectors and on various governing actors influencing each other (Stoker, 1998). In this paper, *governance* is interpreted as:

> *Binding (not necessarily enforceable) decision-making in the public sphere which can involve governmental and non-governmental actors and results in formal and informal rule systems.* (Van den Brande *et al.*, 2008: 3)

The debate on governance sheds new light on the traditional way of thinking about the role of the government. However, some policy problems demand a still more extended view on governance. For example, as the use of certain goods can lead to externalities occurring at various levels, governance at a single territorial level is not sufficient to manage that kind of problems. Internalizing these externalities requires governance at multiple levels including multiple jurisdictions (Marks and Hooghe, 2005: 16). The kind of governance that can be inferred is MLG, which offers, in line with the debate on governance, a way of thinking about politics that moves beyond the traditional one (Bache and Flinders, 2005a). Following the work of authors like Marks and Hooghe (2005), Bache and Flinders (2005a) and Peterson (2003), *Multi-Level Governance* is defined in this paper as:

> *A system of continuous negotiation among nested governance systems at several territorial tiers - global, regional (e.g. European), national, subnational, local - which are enmeshed in territorially overarching policy networks and are the result of a broad process of institutional creation and decisional reallocation that has pulled some previously centralised functions of the state up to supra-national levels and down to sub-national levels.* (Van den Brande *et al.*, 2008: 5)

Bache and Flinders distinguish a vertical and a horizontal dimension in MLG. The vertical dimension concerns the 'multi-level' component and refers to the "increased interdependence

of governments operating at different territorial levels", while the 'governance' component (horizontal dimension) focuses on the "growing interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors at various territorial levels" (Bache and Flinders, 2005b: 3).

Decision-making for sustainable development can be conceptualized by applying a MLG perspective (Van den Brande *et al.*, 2008). Below, we accentuate some of its 'multi-level' and 'governance' characteristics. First, sustainable development concerns cross-border and global problems that need to be tackled at the global as well as at regional, national, subnational and local levels and that consequently require a global policy negotiated at global forums. Second, in order to be successful, sustainable development as a policy domain requires a coordinated, integrated and participatory approach. For attaining that kind of approach, decision-making for sustainable development requires the involvement of governmental and non-governmental actors, such as civil society actors who are operating at all levels. Third, it can be said that decision-making for sustainable development at the global level follows from and results in binding decisions and declarations (e.g. the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation). These decisions and declarations are understood as binding because they are endorsed by the UN Member States. They have, however, no legally binding nature, since they cannot be enforced and sanctioned afterwards. Fourth, decision-making for sustainable development can result in formal (e.g. laws at the national and the subnational level) as well as in informal rule systems (e.g. informal agreements, successful negotiations and partnerships) (Rosenau, 2005: 31-32).

Furthermore, MLG is an interesting model since it ascribes an important role to subnational governments. Concretely, it states that the subnational level tries to be involved in decision-making, for example because of its role in the implementation of internationally negotiated decisions. According to MLG, subnational actors, first of all, operate in interconnected national and supra-national political arenas, while creating transnational associations (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 1-4). Second, subnational actors try to influence decision-making at the international level by engaging in direct exchange with supranational EU institutions and global organizations (Hooghe, 1995: 2). Hooghe and Marks elucidate that attempt as follows: "[Subnational] governments came to realise that unless they participated (…), they would be swept along by international agreements over which they had no control" (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 90). That participation is referred to by the term *subnational mobilization*, which can be interpreted as a response of subnational governments to the traditional way of representation, namely through state representatives. The idea of subnational mobilization is used as the starting point of this paper: how do subnational governments mobilize themselves in order to exert agency in multilateral decision-making for sustainable development? Before discussing a typology of routes for subnational governments to be involved in multilateral

decision-making, the next section first studies the origin and the decision-making setting of the Commission on Sustainable Development of the UN.

2.1 The UN Commission on Sustainable Development

2.1 Origin

By the end of 1992, the call of Agenda 21 to set up a UN Commission on Sustainable Development was answered. The CSD was established as a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (UNCED, 1992a: chapter 38; UNDESA: DSD, 2008a). From the outset, the CSD has had three goals: reviewing progress in the implementation of Agenda 21; elaborating policy guidance and options for future activities; and promoting dialogue and building partnerships for sustainable development (Chasek, 2000). At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) reaffirmed the role of the CSD as high-level forum for sustainable development within the UN system. In addition, the CSD also had to provide policy guidance to follow-up the JPOI at the local, subnational, national, regional and global levels (UNDESA: DSD, 2008a).

2.2 Decision-making setting

The Commission has 53 members which are elected every three years and can be re-elected. Each year, one third of the members of the CSD is elected by ECOSOC. The seats of the CSD are allocated on a regional basis. Each of the 53 members of the CSD has one vote (UN, 1945; UN, 1992). Alternative to membership, non-member participation is allowed to observers, e.g. UN organizations and accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (UNDESA: DSD, 2008c). Public participation is important for the CSD decision-making process. The Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the JPOI clearly emphasize the involvement of all social groups. Agenda 21 refers to them by the term *Major Groups*.[7] The CSD is led by a Bureau and supported by a Secretariat. The Bureau consists of a Chair and four Vice-Chairs. For the Bureau, one person is elected from each regional group (UN GA, 1993: 5).

   At its first substantive session, the CSD agreed upon a multi-year thematic program of its work for the period 1993-1997. In 1997, at Rio+5, the CSD members adopted a new five-year work plan. All chapters of Agenda 21 were integrated in both programs by thematic clusters

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[7] There are nine Major Groups, i.e. Women; Children and Youth; Indigenous People; NGOs; Local Authorities; Workers and Trade Unions; Business and Industry; Scientific and Technological Communities; and Farmers (UNCED, 1992a).

(Chasek, 2000: 380-383). At the CSD-11 session (2003) the Commission opted for a different kind of program of work: from then on the CSD agenda has been planned on the basis of two-year cycles between 2004 and 2017. Every cycle focuses on a specific thematic cluster of issues and their inter-linkages. In addition, a cluster of twelve Cross-cutting Issues is considered during each cycle (UNDESA: DSD, 2008a; UNDESA: DSD, 2008d).[8] CSD-16 and CSD-17, discussed in this paper, are part of a cycle that focuses on the following issues: Agriculture, Rural Development, Land, Drought, Desertification, Africa and the cluster of Cross-cutting Issues.

   Each cycle of two years consists of a review session and a subsequent policy session. During a *review session* (e.g. CSD-16) the progress that has been made for the issues in the thematic cluster of that cycle is evaluated. In addition, the obstacles and constraints are identified and the future challenges are discussed. In order to be better prepared for a review session, Regional Implementation Meetings on sustainable development (RIM) are held beforehand. The regions are clustered according to the regional classification of the UN Economic Commissions.[9] The outcome of each RIM (i.e. a Chair's summary) is presented at the CSD review session in May (UNDESA: DSD, 2008e). The actual negotiations on policy take place, however, during the *policy session* (e.g. CSD-17) the following year where the CSD aims to develop some concrete recommendations concerning the thematic issues under discussion. At the global level, the preparations for a policy session start in February with an Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting (IPM) at the UN Headquarters in New York. The outcome of the IPM (i.e. the Chair's draft negotiating text) serves as the basis for the final negotiations at the CSD policy session in May (UNDESA: DSD, 2008b).

3. Typology of subnational routes to CSD decision-making

Geeraerts *et al.* (2004: 12-15) developed a typology of four subnational routes to be involved in global multilateral decision-making. Their typology can, however, only be applied to subnational governments of EU Member States. The four routes are based on a bipartition between on the one hand intra- or extra-state and on the other hand intra- or extra-European, with "intra" being an indirect and "extra" a direct way. Van den Brande (2009: 8) labelled

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[8] The Cross-cutting Issues are: Poverty eradication; Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; Sustainable development in a globalizing world; Health and sustainable development; Sustainable development of SIDS; Sustainable development for Africa; Other regional initiatives; Means of implementation; Institutional framework for sustainable development; Gender equality; and Education.

[9] There are five regional commissions (subsidiary bodies) of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN (ECOSOC 2007): UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA).

these routes the multi-level route, the European route, the national route and the direct route. Figure 1 visualizes the typology of four routes and applies it to the case of the CSD.
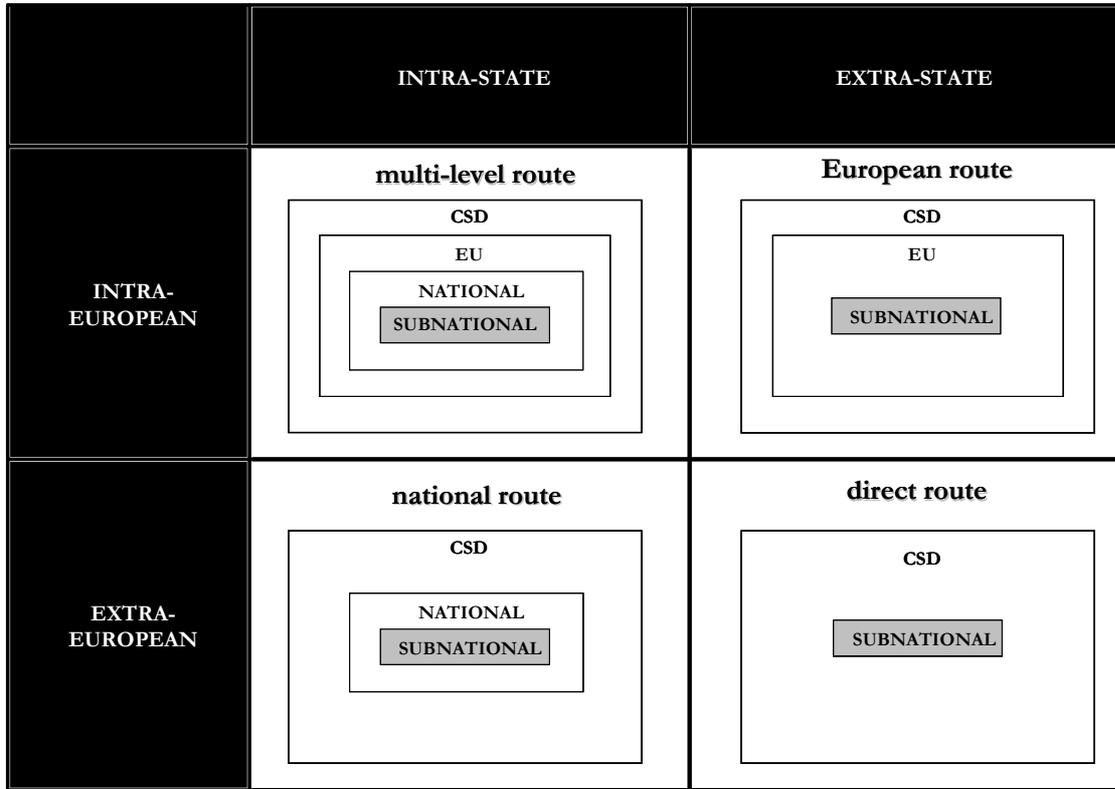
	INTRA-STATE	EXTRA-STATE
INTRA-EUROPEAN	**multi-level route** CSD EU NATIONAL SUBNATIONAL	**European route** CSD EU SUBNATIONAL
EXTRA-EUROPEAN	**national route** CSD NATIONAL SUBNATIONAL	**direct route** CSD SUBNATIONAL

Figure 1. Typology of subnational routes for influencing CSD decision-making (adapted from Geeraerts *et al*., 2004)

The *multi-level route* combines the intra-state and the intra-European dimension. A subnational government participates at global decision-making through the state and through the EU. It is called the multi-level route since all possible levels (subnational, national, regional and global) are involved. Three examples of that route can be given. First, a subnational government uses the multi-level route by participating in the national delegation for EU and CSD negotiations. Second, that route is applied when a subnational government approaches the national government on EU and CSD negotiations. A last example implies that the subnational government appoints a subnational attaché to the national Permanent Representation to the EU.

A subnational government can also opt for a combination of the intra-state and the extra-European dimension. That implies that it only tries to influence the national position that is developed outside of the EU context and presented independently at the global level. The route is called the *national route*. According to Geeraerts *et al.*, such a situation would only be possible when the EU is absent at global negotiations or does not have a common point of

view at global multilateral forums. We, however, consider that route also applicable when, for example, an EU Member State prepares a national statement, which can be aligned with or can deviate from the EU position, and brings it at a global meeting. The main example of that route is thus a subnational government that participates in the national delegation for the preparation of a national statement at CSD.

Third, a subnational government can also try to bypass the state by directly influencing the negotiating position of the EU in global negotiations. That route is labelled the *European route* (extra-state and intra-European). Using that route, a subnational government for example approaches members of the European Commission or tries to influence Members of the European Parliament or members of the Committee of the Regions. Subnational governments campaigning for direct representation in the Council of Ministers (and its workings groups), can also be seen as subnational mobilization through the European route.

Finally, an extra-state and extra-European option is also possible, i.e. the *direct route*. A subnational government tries to influence CSD decision-making without mediation from the state or the EU, for example, through the participation in inter-subnational networks (Geeraerts *et al.*, 2004: 12-15).[10]

4. Flemish routes to the CSD

The external policy activities of Flanders have already been the object of many studies. Paquin (2005) and Criekemans (2006), for example, analyzed the paradiplomacy activities of Flanders. Other authors studied the possibilities for the Flemish government in multilateral organizations such as the WTO and the ILO (Vanden Berghe *et al.*, 2001) and the Flemish governmental involvement in the establishment of EU and multilateral environmental policy (Geeraerts *et al.*, 2004). Flanders is an interesting case because of the specific institutional context of the Belgian federal state. With regard to sustainable development policy in Belgium, competences are divided between the federal government and the subnational entities.[11] However, it is a challenging task to make an overview of that allocation since they are divided not only over the three dimensions of sustainable development, i.e. the economic, the social and the environmental dimension, but also within each dimension.[12] As a

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[10] Examples of the four routes are based on an extensive literature study concerning MLG elaborated in an earlier phase of the research (Van den Brande et al., 2008: 16, 38).

[11] The Belgian subnational entities are the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. The competences of the Flemish Region and the Flemish Community are managed by the government of Flanders.

[12] Several governmental levels are, for example, competent for tax policy (economic dimension), and for employment policy, education and sensitization (social dimension). Concerning the environmental dimension, the subnational entities are largely qualified, with the exception of, for example, the issuing of product norms,

consequence, each government -federal as well as subnational- has to develop a sustainable development policy in accordance with its competences (Van den Bossche *et al.*, 2005: 1-2). That shared responsibility has been endorsed in 2007 by the insertion of an article on sustainable development in the constitution. That article defines sustainable development as a general policy goal for all Belgian governments (Belgian Senate, 2007).

Regarding the institutional context of the Belgian state, it is necessary to consider the 'in foro interno, in foro externo' principle that was adopted with the state reform in 1993. That principle permits the Belgian subnational governments to carry out an external policy for those policy subjects for which they are internally competent (Geeraerts *et al.*, 2004: 19). For decision-making in multilateral organizations, that principle implies that the governments of all subnational entities can participate in the negotiation process for the preparation of the national position; that each subnational government can include representatives in the national delegation for the EU and global meetings; and that an extensive coordination takes place between the federal and subnational governments during the whole decision-making process.[13]

Besides its competences on sustainable development and the particular characteristics of the Belgian state, Flanders is an interesting case because it is a subnational entity with legislative powers. In that way, Flanders is a member of REGLEG[14] or the 'Group of Regions with Legislative Powers'. That group consists of 73 subnational entities across eight EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Finland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK[15]). However, in only three of these EU Member States, i.e. in Austria, Belgium and Germany, access to EU decision-making, in particular to the Council of Ministers, is domestically made possible (cf art. 203 of the Treaty establishing the European Community) (Börzel, 2002: 1-2; Jeffery, 2005: 37; Regleg, 2008). [16]

The rest of this paper will go deeper into each of the four routes (i.e. the multi-level, the national, the European and the direct route) Flanders can use to exert agency in CSD decision-

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the coordination of international environmental policy and its conversion into Belgian law, for which the federal government remains competent.

[13] Since in a Belgian context the notion 'national' cannot be used to refer to the central, i.e. the federal, government, it will only be used when encompassing both the federal and the subnational spheres of government (e.g. the national delegation can consist of federal and subnational representatives).

[14] REGLEG has been established in order to prepare the Nice Intergovernmental Conference. They mainly seek to influence EU policy and decision-making and to realize a higher involvement of subnational entities with legislative powers (Regleg, 2008).

[15] In Finland and Portugal only the island regions have legislative powers.

[16] In Belgium, this results from the 'in foro interno, in foro externo' principle. Anticipating on the state reform of 1993 and in order to apply this principle, Belgium (together with Germany) asked the EU for a change of the former art. 146 of the Maastricht Treaty (art. 203 according to the new numbering of the Amsterdam Treaty). The rewritten article makes it possible for national governments to be represented (speak and negotiate) in the Council of Ministers (though, not in its Working Parties) by members of subnational governments as long as these representatives defend state interests (Geeraerts et al., 2004: 19; Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 83).

making. For each route, two central questions will guide the discussion: 1) what are the main characteristics of the route and how can Flanders use that route? 2) has Flanders used the route and how did Flanders use that route?

4.1 The multi-level route

In order to exert agency and to be involved in CSD-16 and CSD-17, the Flemish government most extensively used the multi-level route. It used that route mainly by participating in the Belgian delegation[17] for regional and global CSD negotiations[18]. For the multi-level route, the fact that the Flemish government was (as a subnational entity of an EU Member State) represented by the EU[19] is important. Since 1993, the EU has been attending the CSD sessions as a group (Kaasa, 2007: 116). Depending on the discussed topics, the EU is represented at the CSD by the EU Presidency or by the European Commission (Wagner, 1999: 114).

The preparatory decision-making process

The EU has its own CSD preparatory decision-making process in which all Member States are involved and aim to develop a common EU position. The preparatory process and the discussion of the topic 'CSD' at the EU, the Belgian and the Flemish level follow from its positioning on the agenda. That is a top-down process in which the agenda of the lower levels is determined by the agenda of the higher levels. First, the EU Presidency places the topic 'CSD' on the agenda of the EU preparatory decision-making body for the CSD. When the EU has set its agenda, the EU agenda points are taken up by the Member States in order to prepare the negotiations at the national level. In the same way, the EU and the national agenda are determining for the negotiations at the Flemish level. The preparatory process is marked by a certain complexity, because of the different levels that are involved and because of the complexity that goes hand in hand with the topic of sustainable development. In order to unravel how that process works three elements need to be taken into account, i.e. the division of competences, the coordinating decision-making bodies and the internal decision-making process.

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[17] The Belgian delegation for CSD meetings usually consists of members of the federal government, of the subnational governments and of non-governmental organizations.

[18] This includes the negotiations in the EU, in the RIM of UNECE, in the IPM at the UN level and in the CSD.

[19] Since the empirical research for this paper is conducted before the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in November 2009, it is necessary to remark that we use the notion 'European Union' (EU) when referring to the European Community (EC) as well as to the EU. The EC is one of the three pillars, namely the community or supranational pillar, on which the EU -established through the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1992- is based. Unlike the EU, the EC is a legal personality with competences. However, the coming into force of the Treaty of Lisbon will imply the abolition of the pillar structure and of the distinction between EU and EC and will grant the EU legal personality (EU, 2007; Sterckx et al., 2007: 32).

Division of competences

The division of competences is an important starting point for understanding the EU preparatory decision-making process. Before the negotiations take place, each governmental level has to determine whether the CSD issues that are under discussion belong to its responsibility. Only then, it is able, and motivated, to be involved in the negotiations. At the EU level, either the national governments or the EU can be competent. Thematic issues belonging to the responsibility of the EU are almost automatically assigned to the European Commission. With regard to the CSD-16/17 cycle the European Commission was competent for the issues Agriculture and Rural Development, the other issues fell under the competence of the Member States. At the national level, the federal government, the subnational governments or both can have the competence. That results from a complex division of competences in Belgium. Sustainable development is no clearly demarcated competence in Belgium, and many issues that are discussed internationally are mixed competences. With regard to the CSD-16/17 cycle, Agriculture, Rural Development and Land could clearly be distinguished as mainly subnational competences. The other issues (Drought, Desertification, Africa and the Cross-cutting Issues & Interlinkages) were mixed competences of the federal and the subnational governments. When comparing both competence divisions, it is notable that the Flemish subnational government is responsible for those issues that are also EU competences. That could illustrate what Jeffery calls the "Europeanization of issues falling under their domestic legislative powers" (Jeffery, 2007: 2), which according to Jeffery even led to legislative regions [subnational entities] fearing the loss of their newly obtained powers to the EU level (Jeffery, 2007). In Flanders, sustainable development policy fell under the responsibility of the Flemish Minister for the Environment, Nature and Energy until 2004. From then on, the Minister-president has been competent for the coordination of the Flemish sustainable development policy. However, the Flemish environment administration still plays a significant role in the follow-up of the CSD negotiations.

Coordinating decision-making body

At each level, the discussion on CSD is prepared in a coordinating decision-making body. In the EU, internal preparatory negotiations take place in the Council Working Party on International Environmental Issues dealing with global issues (WPIEI/global)[20]. That working party gathers monthly in Brussels and its agenda is set by the EU Presidency. The EU Presidencies that guided the Member States through the preparatory decision-making process for the CSD-16/17 cycle (from July 2007 until June 2009) were respectively Portugal,

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[20] A Council Working Party consists of representatives of the EU Presidency, the 27 Member States and the European Commission.

Slovenia, France and the Czech Republic. In the EU, the WPIEI/global is the highest decision-making body that is involved in the preparatory decision-making process for CSD. After the WPIEI/global has accepted an EU position, that position is no longer discussed in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) or in the Environment Council[21]. At the national level of Belgium, the preparatory negotiations take place in a coordinating body, called COORMULTI (i.e. coordination of multilateral issues). In that body, federal and subnational governmental and non-governmental stakeholders (e.g. representatives of advisory bodies, NGOs and universities) participate. A coordinating role is put aside for the federal government and the latter also represents Belgium at regional and global CSD negotiations. With regard to the Belgian Presidency of the EU in 2010 that implies that federal government representatives will preside the WPIEI/global meeting, while the possibility exists that subnational government representatives will represent Belgium in the WPIEI/global. In order to prepare the CSD agenda points of the WPIEI/global, the COORMULTI aims at assembling only a few days before the WPIEI/global. The Flemish government can be represented in the COORMULTI and the agenda of that body influences what is discussed at the subnational level of Flanders. At the Flemish level, the (inter)national negotiations with regard to CSD are on the agenda of the interdepartmental Working Group on Sustainable Development (WGDO), in which all Flemish departments are represented by their sustainable development experts. The WGDO aims to elaborate general and coordinated policy goals with regard to sustainable development and provides a forum to harmonize sustainable development policies at the administrative level (Vlaamse Overheid, 2008). There is a clear link between the coordination meetings at the national and the EU level, since the national coordination meetings take place only a few days before the EU preparatory meeting. At the Flemish level, the dates of the meetings of the WGDO are not attuned to the dates of the national and European preparatory meetings and the topic 'CSD' figured only a few times on its agenda during the whole period. The WGDO does thus not function as a real coordinating decision-making body for the CSD.

Internal decision-making: lead, pilot and puller

In order to structure internal decision-making, each coordinating decision-making body uses a system in which an official is made responsible for the internal supervision of an individual decision-making dossier (or a part of it). That official is called the *puller* at the Flemish level, the *pilot* at the Belgian level and the *lead(country)* at the EU level. In general, the puller, the pilot and the lead can only be appointed for those thematic issues that belong to their

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[21] Since the WPIEI/global conclusions on CSD are not discussed in the Council, the Flemish government cannot benefit from art. 203 of the Treaty establishing the European Community and the Belgian provision that resulted from it to represent Belgium in the Environment Council.

responsibility.[22] Only at the Flemish level, that official (i.e. the puller) also has the mandate to defend the Flemish point of view in national and international arenas. At the national level, federal officials or diplomats represent Belgium internationally, while at the EU level the EU Presidency or the European Commission speaks for the EU in the CSD. An important role is put aside for the Flemish puller. Since the WGDO is not used to coordinate a Flemish position on the CSD, the puller needs to create a network of experts with whom he/she stays in contact during the whole decision-making process. During the preparations of the CSD-16/17 cycle a Flemish government official was the Belgian pilot for the sub-cluster of the issues Agriculture, Rural Development and Land; the other issues (which are mixed competences) were assigned to federal officials. Since the other Belgian subnational governments did not take up a pilot position, the Flemish government was the only subnational government that was pilot for specific issues. In the EU, lead (countries) were appointed by the WPIEI/global for various sub-clusters of issues. Their appointment (or mandate) could cover only CSD-16 or CSD-17, but it could also last the whole cycle. The European Commission, for example, was lead for Agriculture and Rural Development during the whole CSD-16/17 cycle. Another example is Belgium, that was lead country for the sub-cluster Cross-cutting Issues, Interlinkages and Means of Implementation when preparing CSD-16 and co-lead country together with the United Kingdom when preparing CSD-17.

EU decision-making on CSD

All these aspects with regard to the division of competences, the coordinating decision-making bodies and the internal decision-making process facilitate the understanding of the EU preparatory decision-making process for the CSD negotiations. The process can be summarized as follows. Each level (i.e. EU, Belgium and Flanders) has a decision-making body (i.e. WPIEI/global, COORMULTI and WGDO) of which the agenda is determined by the agenda of the higher levels and which is used to define a common point of view on CSD issues. That common point of view is internally coordinated by an appointed official (i.e. lead (country), pilot and puller) who is responsible for the internal supervision of the dossier that is under discussion. The position of each level is defended externally, in the decision-making body at the higher level. That multi-level EU preparatory process helps the EU Member States to achieve a common EU point of view for the UN meetings, that take place at the regional level (the RIM of UNECE) and at the global level (the IPM and the CSD-meeting itself).

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[22] However, at the EU level this sometimes leads to competence conflicts between the European Commission and the Member States, for example when the European Commission wants to take the lead for issues that are mainly Member State competences.

The CSD discussions

After a whole year of preparations at all levels, the Flemish delegation gets ready for the discussions at CSD itself. As members of the Belgian delegation, Flemish officials can participate at and observe the CSD meeting. In order to prepare the CSD meeting, daily national and EU coordination meetings are organized before the CSD meeting itself. Indeed, not all EU positions are adopted beforehand at the meetings of the WPIEI/global in Brussels, so intensive coordination meetings on the spot are necessary. Although the national coordination meeting is, among others, designed to discuss the Belgian point of view on the EU position that national meeting was usually not used to that end. Instead, the Belgian point of view was often decided in a smaller group (without non-governmental stakeholders) at, for example, an informal meeting or at the EU coordination meeting itself among the delegates who were present. The agenda of the daily national and EU coordination meetings differed between CSD-16 and CSD-17. CSD-16 included (interactive) discussions in which different negotiating groups, states and observers brought statements on best practices, obstacles, constraints and challenges with regard to the thematic issues. The national and EU coordination meetings thus consisted of the discussion and development of the EU statements (also called speaking points). During CSD-17 the EU had to prepare less EU statements *an sich*. Instead it mainly focussed on the development of the EU position (or the key lines the EU could take during the negotiations) on the draft negotiating text that was discussed at CSD-17. In preparation of the national and the EU coordination meetings, the Flemish delegates (among which the Flemish puller) did not set up a formal coordination meeting, but mainly focused on the Flemish point of view defined at home or on their own expertise.

Debriefing process

Crucial to the whole decision-making process in the CSD is how the outcome of the CSD sessions (a Chair's summary at a review session and a final report with policy recommendations to take action at a policy session) is taken back home and implemented afterwards. An important step to that end is the debriefing process. After two weeks of discussions at the CSD, all delegations -governmental and non-governmental- at all levels have to report about the discussions. At the Flemish level, the puller of the CSD dossier reports to the members of his/her department and to the members of the WGDO. At the national level, all members of the national delegation for the CSD work together to draw up a report. The formulation of the report is coordinated by the federal government. At the EU level, a report on the outcome of the CSD is drawn up by the EU Presidency and discussed at the next WPIEI/global in June. That WPIEI/global is usually rather informal and organized in the country of the EU Presidency instead of in Brussels. Sometimes, the EU Presidency also

informs the Environment Council or another related Council (e.g. Agriculture and Fisheries with regard to the CSD-16/17 cycle) about the CSD conclusions. That was, for example, the case after CSD-17 at the Environment Council of June 25 2009.

Conclusion: Flanders using the multi-level route

By using the multi-level route, i.e. by being a member of the Belgian delegation for the EU and the CSD, the Flemish government has many opportunities to exert agency and to be involved in the decision-making process. The Flemish government can, for example, take up the position of pilot within the national coordination meetings. As a pilot the Flemish government can assure that the Flemish position is taken into account in the national position. In addition, the Flemish government can attend the EU coordination meetings, which results from the 'in foro interno, in foro externo' principle. These coordination meetings can have a formal and an informal character. By using the multi-level route the Flemish government can thus (although formally representing the Belgian state) also participate in informal EU internal decision-making and receive direct information about the EU decision-making process. Finally, the Flemish government can also attend the global, CSD, meetings. Since not all positions are adopted beforehand, the Flemish government has the opportunity to attend those meetings on the spot where the final positions are defined. This paper does not investigate the influence the Flemish government has exercised through this route, however the above mentioned opportunities need to be looked at when analyzing the influence the Flemish government can exert in the decision-making process.

To conclude the description of how Flanders used the multi-level route, it is necessary to briefly discuss if and how Flanders has used two other possibilities within the multi-level route. First, the Flemish government can, for example, approach the federal government on EU and CSD negotiations. Although a formal cooperation agreement, which arranges the national coordination on international sustainable development policy[23] between the federal and the subnational governments, does not exist, it is common practice and informally agreed that the federal government informs (and forwards documents to) the subnational governments. Nevertheless, because of the complex federal state structure and a certain kind of distrust between the different governments, the Flemish government often also contacts the federal government in order to ensure that all information on CSD issues comes through. Second, the Flemish government can appoint a Flemish attaché responsible for sustainable development to the Flemish Representation to the Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU. That Flemish attaché would then be able to follow-up the CSD discussions in the EU.

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[23] The national coordination practices on sustainable development are not formally agreed in a cooperation agreement, but aspects of it seem to be based on the Cooperation Agreement on International Environment Policy (Belgisch Staatsblad, 1995).

The follow-up of sustainable development issues by Flemish attachés has been varying between 2001 and 2009. Before 2001, the Flemish Permanent Representation to the EU consisted of one Permanent Representative. In 2001, because of the upcoming Belgian Presidency of the EU in the second half of that year, a team of Flemish attachés that would assist the Flemish Permanent Representative has been established. Until 2006, sustainable development was followed-up by the Flemish attaché responsible for Environment. In 2006, together with the institutionalization of sustainable development at the level of the Flemish administration, the Flemish attaché responsible for the External policy of the EU was appointed sustainable development as one of her responsibilities. After two years it seemed however, that no separate sustainable development attaché was needed anymore because of the existence of a well functioning intra-Belgian coordination and consultation system. The Permanent Representation would from then on only function as an intermediary for passing on information. Since the beginning of 2008, the Flemish Representation therefore started from the idea of integrating sustainable development in the responsibilities of each Flemish attaché. In that way, every Flemish attaché has to take into account sustainable development issues when they are linked to the own responsibilities. In preparation of the next Belgian EU Presidency in 2010, sustainable development will probably again be allocated to one Flemish attaché who will follow it up in a coordinating way. Although there has been a mechanism in the Flemish Representation to follow-up sustainable development issues in the EU from 2001 on, the Flemish attachés have never been involved in EU decision-making on the CSD and thus with regard to the CSD-16/17 cycle. That possibility within the multi-level route has thus not been used by Flanders as a way to be involved in CSD decision-making.

4.2 The national route

A second route the Flemish government can use to be involved in CSD-decision-making, is the national route. Through that route, Flanders tries to influence the national negotiations on the Belgian statements for CSD meetings. Although the EU statement covers its Member States, all Member States can still express themselves by bringing national statements. The Belgian statements are prepared at the national level with the involvement of federal and subnational decision-makers. The national route runs partly parallel to the multi-level route. The same decision-makers and decision-making bodies are involved in the decision-making process. At the Flemish level the discussions take place in the WGDO, at the national level the discussions take place in the COORMULTI and during the national coordination meetings on the spot. Since that decision-making process is already extensively described in the discussion of the multi-level route, it is not discussed again in this section. Here, we will

focus on some examples of how Flanders used the national route with regard to CSD-16 and CSD-17. In the decision-making process for CSD-16 and CSD-17, the national route has been used three times: to develop 1) a national statement on best practices that was brought at the third RIM of UNECE in January 2008; 2) a national statement for the High-Level Segment of CSD-16; and 3) a Belgian input for the intervention of the Belgian Ambassador during the first Round Table of the High-Level Segment of CSD-17.

The RIM of UNECE (2008) consisted of five interactive discussions. All UNECE member states and other stakeholders could participate (UNECE, 2008). A Belgian statement on best practices was brought in the session on Agriculture and Rural Development. On the matter of that statement, the Belgian delegation had distributed a document about *Some Belgian best practices on the thematic area of Agriculture and Rural Development* (Government of Belgium, 2008). The drafting of the document was decided at the COORMULTI with the intention of supporting a possible Belgian intervention at the RIM. At the same time, it was also agreed that the subnational governments of Flanders and Wallonia would provide input for the document. Indeed, in Belgium, Agriculture and Rural Development are subnational responsibilities.[24] The provision of the Flemish text was coordinated by the Flemish puller who contacted his Flemish network of experts. At the next COORMULTI the Flemish and the Walloon texts were discussed and a coordinating role was put aside for the (federal) chair of the COORMULTI to put both texts together into one document that would be finalized before the RIM would take place. In the end, the document consisted of respectively a Flemish and a Walloon text (since Flanders and Wallonia focus on different aspects in their Agriculture and Rural Development policies). The Flemish input in the Belgian *best practices* document is a clear example of the Flemish government using the *national route* to exert agency in the CSD decision-making process.

At CSD-16 as well as at CSD-17, Belgium intervened once in each session (in contrast to some other EU Member States who intervened more than once). That concerned respectively a Belgian statement on 'The Way Forward' at the High-Level Segment of CSD-16 and a Belgian intervention in the first Round Table 'Responding to the Food Crisis through Sustainable Development' of the High-Level Segment of CSD-17. While the statement for the RIM was mostly prepared at the COORMULTI, the statement at CSD-16 and the intervention at CSD-17 were set up during the daily national coordination meetings.

The Flemish government uses the national route to be involved in the decision-making process. Yet, it is not the most often used route since few national statements are formulated by the Belgian delegation. Two reasons (an internal and an external one) can explain that low

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[24] In Belgium, the three Regions (*Gewesten*) are responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development. However, Agriculture plays a less important role in the Brussels Capital Region than in the other two Regions.

frequency. First, delivering a Belgian statement for CSD requires an intensive internal coordination process in which various actors (federal and subnational governmental and non-governmental stakeholders) need to be involved. All these actors need to come to a consensus on a Belgian statement and in the end that often results in a compromise that is the sum of federal and subnational interests. In addition, -as for all national negotiations in Belgium- if no compromise is reached, there will be no Belgian position and the Belgian representative is supposed to withhold from bringing a Belgian statement. Second, many EU Member States (though not all) restrain from delivering national statements, because it is discouraged by the EU Presidency and the European Commission. The latter want the EU to appear at CSD with one EU position[25] and consider the EU position weakened if many EU Member States bring a national statement in addition to the EU statement. Some Member States, however, insist on delivering a national statement on certain issues. That national statement then needs to be in line with the EU statement and the Member States are asked to previously announce the statement at the EU coordination meetings. A difference can be noticed between a review (CSD-16) and a policy session (CSD-17). In general, the EU Presidency and the European Commission are more tolerant for statements on best practices. For that reason, some EU Member States (e.g. Austria) brought about five national statements at CSD-16.

4.3 The European route

Next to the multi-level and the national route, the Flemish government can also use a European route to exert agency in the decision-making process. That is by combining the intra-European and the extra-state dimension and can be illustrated by four examples.

Approaching members of the European Commission

A first example, that has also been used the most by members of the Flemish government who were involved in CSD decision-making, implies that the Flemish government approaches members of the European Commission with regard to the CSD negotiations. The European Commission is involved in the CSD decision-making process as an observer at CSD and as a participant at the internal EU preparatory decision-making process on CSD. With regard to the latter, the European Commission is one of the 29 negotiating partners (next to the EU Presidency and the 27 Member States) at the WPIEI/global meeting. Within the European Commission it is the Directorate-General (DG) Environment (in particular the International Affairs Directorate) that is responsible for the follow-up of the CSD negotiations. Their role is

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[25] In addition, the CSD Bureau promotes statements of negotiating groups (such as G-77/China, and also the EU) and the CSD Bureau can ask to limit the number of statements of individual states due to time constraints.

threefold. Within the European Commission they coordinate the position of the European Commission in the WPIEI/global and (together with DG Development) they organize and preside an Inter-Service Group on the topic CSD. That Inter-Service Group gathers a few times a year with experts from different DG's who deal with the topic to discuss the CSD negotiations. Within the EU they try to make sure that the CSD discussions in the WPIEI/global are in harmony with discussions on the same topics in other Council Working Parties. At the international stage, they are part of the EU Troika[26] and dependent from the topic under discussion they can also represent (and speak for) the EU at the CSD.

The European Commission is primarily an important actor to approach by the Flemish government, for those topics on the CSD agenda that are EU responsibilities (i.e. of the European Community) as well as Flemish responsibilities. During the CSD-16/17 cycle, for example, the topics Agriculture and Rural Development, were thematic issues on which the European Commission took the lead within the WPIEI/global. Indeed, the Common Agriculture Policy is an important first pillar competence of the EU (European Commission, 2009). At the same time, these issues were also subnational (Flemish) responsibilities within Belgium. As a result, the function of pilot could be assigned to a subnational delegate. That position was assigned to Flanders in the COORMULTI and a delegate of the Flemish government was consequently responsible for the internal coordination of a national point of view on the CSD issues Agriculture and Rural Development. As a pilot within Belgium, that Flemish delegate could attend the formal EU coordination meetings in the WPIEI/global. The latter made it possible for the Flemish delegate to approach European Commission officials during the meetings and to participate in informal sub-groups organized by the European Commission (as lead for Agriculture and Rural Development), while defending mainly a subnational, Flemish, position[27]. In addition, by having access to the Belgian delegation for EU and CSD negotiations, the Flemish government also has the possibility to approach members of the European Commission, the EU Presidency or of Member States. However, two remarks can be made in this regard. First, the Flemish delegate who is Belgian pilot in fact has to defend a national position, although that position can be just a sum of subnational positions. Second, when a Flemish delegate approaches European Commission officials, the latter consider that delegate as a member of the Belgian delegation and not as a representative of a subnational entity. In general, outsiders to the Belgian delegation do not know in detail

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[26] In the past, the EU Troika consisted of the former, the present and the future EU Presidency. Currently, the EU Troika is often composed of the European Commission, the present and the future Presidency (Schunz et al., 2009: 5)

[27] Since the Walloon Region was, in general, less involved in the negotiations with regard to the CSD issues Agriculture and Rural Development, the Flemish delegate (and Belgian pilot) could mainly defend a Flemish position at the EU level.

how the Belgian delegation is composed and thus do not distinguish which members of the Belgian delegation represent the federal government or a subnational government.

In sum, the Flemish government can approach members of the European Commission and has done so with regard to the CSD-16/17 cycle, though not in a way that is mostly described in the academic literature. Authors usually cite how subnational governments try to influence the policy preparation process of the European Commission, for example with regard to Cohesion Policy (Hooghe and Marks, 1996: 78-82). With regard to CSD, however, the European Commission does not prepare proposals for EU legislation or European Commission communications. Instead, the European Commission is involved in the internal EU preparations for the international CSD negotiations and only in this regard it can be interesting for the Flemish government to maintain links with European Commission officials.

Influencing Members of European Parliament

The Flemish government can also try to influence Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) as a way to use the European route to CSD decision-making. However, therefore MEPs need to be involved in CSD decision-making. As elaborated above, the European Commission does not prepare policy proposals or other EU documents on CSD decision-making and is only internally involved in EU decision-making with regard to CSD. Consequently, MEPs cannot be involved in EU decision-making on CSD by proposing amendments for European Commission proposals. However, MEPs are permitted to take part in EU negotiations at the international level and to send small delegations of MEPs[28] to international conferences (such as CSD) that are relevant to the work of the Committees of the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2002: 5; European Parliament, 2007a). The participation of a delegation of MEPs at CSD needs to follow a request of the President of the European Parliament that is discussed and decided[29] in COREPER II.

In 2005, a delegation of the European Parliament attended a CSD meeting for the first time (more concretely the High-Level Segment of CSD-13). The delegation existed of members of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) and of the Committee on Development (DEVE) and participated at CSD in order to understand the CSD process (it was a so-called fact-finding mission) (European Parliament, 2005). The following two years, a European Parliament delegation attended the High-Level Segment of CSD-14 and CSD-15 and existed respectively of MEPs of the ENVI Committee and of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) and of only MEPs of the ENVI Committee)

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[28] Small delegations of MEPs can, for example, also be send to EU Member States or candidate countries and to EU agencies falling under the responsibility of a European Parliament Committee.

[29] The Committee of Permanent Representatives may adopt a procedural decision on this item, pursuant to Article 19 (7) of the Council's Rules of Procedure.

(European Parliament, 2006; European Parliament, 2007b). No European Parliament delegation attended CSD-16 or CSD-17. The MEPs who are attending a CSD meeting are briefed in advance by members of the European Commission. At CSD, the MEPs are not authorized to attend the daily morning EU coordination meetings on the spot, but they are debriefed by the European Commission and on an irregular basis by the EU Presidency. Next to attending the CSD meetings and side-events, the MEPs for example also organize (bilateral) meetings with other parliamentarians, with other delegations or with representatives of UN programmes.

After its participation at CSD-14, the delegation of the European Parliament strongly recommended the European Parliament to continue the follow-up of the CSD-15 negotiations. The issues on the agenda and the negotiations on policy recommendations at CSD-15 resulted in a new delegation of MEPs that was sent to CSD-15 (European Parliament, 2006). The CSD-15 delegation, however, advised the ENVI Committee to reflect on the necessity to have a delegation of MEPs on the spot and to, instead, monitor the CSD activities without sending a delegation to CSD-16. Further research[30] needs to be done to find out the exact reasons why no MEPs delegation attended CSD-16 and CSD-17 and if the European Parliament intends to send a delegation to future CSD sessions. Possible reasons could be that the attendance of the previous MEPs delegations made it possible to understand the CSD process, that the delegation is not involved in internal EU decision-making on the spot and can thus not influence the process, that CSD-16 was considered to be less important because of its review character and that CSD-17 took place before the European Parliament elections of 2009.

Since there is no internal EU legislation (or Commission proposals) on CSD matters, the only way MEPs would be able to influence the EU decision-making process on CSD would be by trying to have an impact on the spot. However, no delegation of MEPs was sent to CSD-16 and CSD-17 and MEPs who attended the CSD meetings before were merely observers of the CSD process and could not even attend the EU coordination meetings (a privilege Flemish officials have within the Belgian delegation). The Flemish government would thus also not benefit from influencing MEPs during the preparatory EU decision-making process in Brussels. The empirical data confirms that assumption as Flemish officials who were involved in the CSD decision-making process did not have contacts with (Flemish) MEPs in Brussels with regard to the CSD-16/17 cyle. That example of the European route has thus not been used by the Flemish government.

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[30] An interview is scheduled with a staff member of the Secretariat of the ENVI Committee.

Influencing members of the Committee of the Regions

Although the Committee of the Regions stands for an extra-state access to EU decision-making, it has often been described as a rather weak institution (Jeffery, 2000: 4; Keating and Pintarits, 1997: 9; Loughlin, 1996: 155). The Committee of the Regions was established in 1992 by the Treaty of Maastricht and has hold its inaugural plenary session in 1994. It is an institution that represents the subnational and the local level in EU policy development and EU legislation and that has to be consulted by the Council and the European Commission with regard to new proposals in areas that could have an impact on the regional or the local level (Committee of the Regions, 2009b). Five such areas were defined in the Maastricht Treaty, i.e. economic and social cohesion, trans-European infrastructure networks, health, education and culture. The Amsterdam Treaty added five other areas, i.e. employment policy, social policy, the environment, vocational training and transport. In other areas, the European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament are not obliged, but they can consult the Committee of the Regions. Finally, the Committee of the Regions can also formulate opinions on its own initiative (Committee of the Regions, 2009a). For the current mandate 2006-2009 the Committee of the Regions has established six specialized commissions, one of them is the Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE).

The DEVE Commission already exists since 2002 when it was established within the third four-year mandate of the Committee of the Regions (2002-2005). It followed-up the Commission on Land Use Planning, Environment and Energy and is probably set up as a result of the worldwide interest for the Johannesburg Summit in 2002. The DEVE Commission is responsible for issues, such as Environment, Common Agricultural Policy, Energy, Consumer Policy and for all issues related to the European Strategy for Sustainable Development. It is thus called Commission for Sustainable Development, but deals with a wide variety of issues. At the moment, political negotiations are going on with regard to the name of the Commission during the next mandate of the Committee of the Regions (2010-2013).

The Committee of the Regions has not been involved in CSD-16 and CSD-17 negotiations. Overall, it seems that the Committee of the Regions has never been involved in the EU negotiations on the CSD. That could be due to limited capacity within the DEVE Commission, but also because of the fact that the Commission does not produce legislative proposals with regard to CSD. In addition, low political weight is generally attributed to the CSD and the sessions of the CSD do not often evoke a high (political) interest. Global negotiations that attract more media and political attention, such as the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 and the 15th Conference of the Parties (CoP-15) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen at the end of 2009, usually have a higher

attendance and stimulate lower levels to take more initiatives. For example, for the first time a delegation of the Committee of the Regions will attend CoP-15 as an observer within the EU delegation. That delegation will have the same statute as, for example, a MEP delegation to the CSD: attending the meetings, networking, organizing side-events. It is interesting to note that that delegation will be high-level and will consist of the President of the Committee of the Regions, who is currently a Flemish politician. Such a Committee of the Regions delegation could thus also be set up for future CSD negotiations.

The Flemish government is a member of the Committee of the Regions from the beginning. Yet, it is stated by many authors that subnational entities with large constitutional access to national and EU decision-making, like Flanders, often do not use the Committee of the Regions for influencing EU policy. Participating in the Committee of the Regions does thus not offer them extra opportunities (Bomberg and Peterson, 1998: 225; Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 82; Jeffery, 2007: 4-5). In addition, subnational entities often criticize the diversified character of the Committee, that tries to reconcile local and subnational interests (Bomberg and Peterson, 1998: 225; Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 82). With regard to the CSD-16/17 cycle, the Flemish government has not used the possibility to influence (Flemish) members of the Committee of the Regions. That can be explained by the fact that the Committee of the Regions does not try to influence internal preparatory EU decision-making on CSD, but also by the fact that the Flemish government has quiet large access to EU (and CSD) decision-making through the state.

Campaigning for direct representation in the Council of Ministers

A last example of the European route would be that the Flemish government campaigns for direct representation in the Council of Ministers. At this moment, some mechanisms provide already access for subnational governments to the Council of Ministers. Art. 203 of the Treaty establishing the European Community makes it possible for national governments to be represented (speak and negotiate) in the Council of Ministers by members of subnational governments as long as these representatives defend state interests (Geeraerts *et al.*, 2004: 19; Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 83). As a result of the 'in foro interno, in foro externo' principle, in 1994 the federal government and subnational governments of Belgium negotiated a Cooperation Agreement about the representation of Belgium in the Council of Ministers of the EU (Belgisch Staatsblad, 1994). That agreement formally fixed the presence of the Belgian Ministers in the different Council formations. All matters discussed by the Council of Ministers are assigned to one of six categories and for each category the Ministerial representation of Belgium is defined. In 2003, that Cooperation Agreement has been changed (Belgisch Staatsblad, 2003), in particular with regard to Environment that has moved from

category II to category III. For matters in category I, a federal minister represents Belgium. In Category II, a federal minister can be accompanied by a subnational assessor. In category III, a subnational minister is accompanied by a federal assessor and for category IV matters, a subnational minister represents Belgium. Category V and VI concern one matter, i.e. respectively Fisheries and Agriculture. For the former, the Flemish responsible minister represents Belgium, in the case of the latter, the federal minister speaks for the Flemish and the Walloon minister (Belgisch Staatsblad, 2003; Vlaamse Vertegenwoording bij de EU - Permanente Vertegenwoordiging van België, 2009).

As elaborated in the discussion of the multi-level route, the highest preparatory decision-making body in the EU with regard to CSD is the WPIEI/global. In contrast to other international negotiations, such as those on UNFCCC (Schunz *et al.*, 2009: 5), the WPIEI/global only adopts the position papers for CSD and does not prepare Environment Council conclusions on CSD. Because of the limited role of the Environment Council with regard to CSD, i.e. for debriefing about the CSD negotiations by the EU Presidency, campaigning for direct representation in the Council of Ministers would not create an extra opportunity for the Flemish subnational government to exert agency in the EU decision-making process on CSD. Indeed, it can be noted that the Flemish government did not use this possibility in order to be more involved in CSD-16 and CSD-17.

4.4 The direct route

Finally, subnational governments can try to bypass the state and the EU and use a direct route to UN decision-making. The most obvious example of that route is the participation in inter-subnational networks. These networks are defined as "associations formed between subnational entities of different states whose ultimate purpose is to act as pressure groups in multilateral institutions, and foster co-operation based upon common interests, needs and aspirations" (Happaerts *et al.*, 2010).

For this paper, especially the first aim of these networks is important, i.e. their external dimension (Happaerts *et al.*, 2010) or how subnational entities try to mobilize through these inter-subnational networks in order to defend their interests at the international level. Subnational mobilization arose on the international scene as a consequence of European integration processes (Fairbrass and Jordan, 2005: 150; Sodupe, 1999). Many inter-subnational networks were established, most of them aiming to influence the EU institutions (for example the Assembly of European Regions, AER, and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions in Europe, CPMR). Only a few inter-subnational networks focus their

lobbying activities on the global level. These networks exist of members from different continents and want to exert agency in UN decision-making (Happaerts *et al.*, 2009).

One such a network is the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD). That Network has been formally established in 2003 and results from the Gauteng Declaration, which was signed at a parallel meeting to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (2002) by representatives of 22 subnational governments and by 4 inter-subnational associations (The Gauteng Declaration, 2002). After its establishment, nrg4SD has been rapidly institutionalized (Happaerts *et al.*, 2010) and now has a formalized structure with a legal foundation[31], a Steering Committee, two Co-chairs, a Secretariat, a Treasury, a budget, an annual General Assembly and an three-yearly Summit (nrg4SD, 2009). According to Happaerts *et al.* (2010), nrg4SD's goals can be discussed by starting from a division between internal and external dimensions of inter-subnational networks. Within the internal dimension, nrg4SD aims to promote co-operation between its members (e.g. through bilateral partnerships, policy learning or information-sharing). The external dimension implies that nrg4SD wants to be a voice for and represent subnational governments at the global level. In this regard, the Network mainly focuses on the CSD, the UNFCCC and the UN Environmental Program's Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environmental Forum (UNEP GC/GMEF) negotiations (nrg4SD, 2005). It has already been accredited with the observer status before UNFCCC (since November 2005) and UNEP GC/GMEF (since February 2007) and is trying to obtain observer status before ECOSOC (nrg4SD, 2008: 4).

nrg4SD's focus on the CSD negotiations can be an opportunity for subnational governments, such as the Flemish government, to be directly involved in CSD decision-making. The Network introduced its activities for the first time at a side-event of CSD-11 (2003). The following four CSD sessions nrg4SD participated[32] at the Partnerships Fair of CSD (CSD-12 until CSD-15), having registered as a CSD Partnership for Sustainable Development[33] (UNDESA: DSD, 2009b). No representatives of nrg4SD participated at CSD-16 and at CSD-17, which was the first time since the creation of the Network.[34] An explanation for that non-attendance can be found in the revised nrg4SD Strategy and the renewed nrg4SD Work Program (2008-2011).[35] An internal review of the Network resulted in a revision of the previously decided thematic priorities[36] and switched the Network's focus

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[31] nrg4SD has been incorporated into Belgian Law as an international non-profit association.

[32] Through presentations, an information desk and participation at discussions.

[33] These partnerships resulted from the WSSD and are voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at implementing sustainable development (UNDESA: DSD, 2009c).

[34] However, nrg4SD's attendance is again scheduled in its Work Programme for CSD-18 (2010) and CSD-19 (2011).

[35] After a period of stagnation and some criticism on its functioning by the members of nrg4SD, the Network decided to have an internal review.

[36] These were based on the multi-year Programme of Work of the CSD.

for the period 2008-2011 to Climate Change, Biodiversity and Water & Sanitation (nrg4SD, 2008). That resulted, among others, from the high level of political attention paid in 2008 and 2009 to the meetings of the CoP of UNFCCC respectively CoP-14 in Poznan (December 2008) and CoP-15 in Copenhagen (December 2009). The timing of those meetings together with limited resources (with regard to the staff of the nrg4SD Secretariat) led to nrg4SD's main focus on climate change and on UNFCCC. Yet, nrg4SD still plans to attend the next CSD sessions, for example CSD-18 in 2010. In general, nrg4SD's participation at the CSD meetings has remained limited. The Network has not yet obtained observer status before ECOSOC, which would clear the way for representation and participation at the CSD meetings. Currently, nrg4SD aims to obtain that status through its membership of the Forum of Global Associations of Regions (FOGAR)[37], which aspires to be recognized by the UN as an intergovernmental organization (IGO) (Happaerts *et al.*, 2010). With its legal registration as a non-profit association, nrg4SD could consider accreditation to the UN, and consequently consultative status to ECOSOC as a non-governmental organization. That would, however, assign a non-governmental character to nrg4SD, something that the Network aims to avoid.

In addition, nrg4SD's accreditation to the UN would make it possible for nrg4SD to be represented at the CSD by the Major Group Local Authorities (UNDESA: DSD, 2009a). Indeed, at the UN subnational governments are considered to be part of the 'local' level. In CSD, the local level is recognized and represented by the Major Group Local Authorities. The activities of that Major Group (e.g. background papers, the preparation of statements, its representation) are coordinated by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability. That is an international association of over 1100 local governments (cities, towns, counties and their associations) worldwide (ICLEI, 2009a; ICLEI,2009b). nrg4SD did, however, never make use of the opportunity to cooperate with ICLEI and to participate at the Local Authorities Major Group. That could be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that nrg4SD wants to make a clear distinction between the subnational level and the local level, usually including cities and municipalities. On the other hand, the possible influence Major Groups can have, could also account for nrg4SD's choice. In general, few local authorities participate at CSD meetings and few subnational organizations are accredited to the UN. The role Major Groups can play at CSD seems to be limited: they have only few possibilities for interventions, their interventions have to be short (they are often limited to one minute) and non-governmental actors seem to have more impact by influencing national delegations.

Happaerts *et al.* (2010) studied the participation of Flanders in nrg4SD. Flanders has been involved in the Network from the very beginning. It is one of the co-founders of nrg4SD and the Flemish government has often been considered as one of its most active members.

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[37] nrg4SD has been appointed FOGAR's representative with regard to sustainable development.

Flanders has been a member of the Steering Committee and it has been represented at many of nrg4SD's events.[38] Yet, Flanders is also one of the members who questioned the internal functioning of the Network and asked for a revision of nrg4SD's strategy (Happaerts *et al.*, 2010). At the moment, it is unclear how Flanders will be involved in nrg4SD in the future. With regard to nrg4SD's involvement at the international level (or its external dimension), Flanders has always been enthusiastic about nrg4SD's intention to achieve accreditation before international institutions. The Flemish government wants to have a voice at the international level and nrg4SD's international ambitions can be a way to obtain recognition for the role of subnational governments. Nevertheless, nrg4SD's value for Flanders in this regard remains limited to a so-called identity politics[39]. That implies that Flanders uses the Network to create an international personality, for example, by having Flemish representatives operating at the international level (Happaerts *et al.*, 2010). Flanders does thus not use the Network to influence international decision-making. According to Happaerts *et al.* (2010) that can be explained by the fact that the Flemish government can use other routes, mainly intra-state routes such as the multi-level and the national route, through which it can have more involvement in the process.[40] In addition, the Flemish government feels it has not yet been able to influence international processes through nrg4SD.

In conclusion, the Flemish government has until now not used nrg4SD to influence CSD decision-making. It has been present at nrg4SD events organized in the framework of the CSD meetings, but that can mainly be declared by the presence of the Flemish government at the CSD as a member of the Belgian delegation. In addition, nrg4SD has not attended the CSD-16 and CSD-17 meetings and has thus -contrary to the previous years- not organized side-events or not participated at the CSD Partnerships Fair. The Flemish government could thus also not use the direct route to CSD-16/17 decision-making. Yet, depending on nrg4SD's attendance at the next CSD meetings and on its future goals with regard to CSD, the direct route could offer opportunities for directly influencing CSD decision-making. The Flemish government will thus need to stay informed on nrg4SD's intentions with regard to CSD.

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[38] This representation has been mainly at administrative level and often because of the Flemish government's attendance at international meetings as part of the Belgian delegation. Flanders's political engagement has been rather small.

[39] Happaerts et al. (2010) state that identity politics is "aimed at helping identity or nation-building at home" and is "more likely to found in cases where subnational entities have their own language and culture or in those with aspirations for higher autonomy".

[40] Other subnational governments, such as the Basque Country, do not have the same national opportunities to be involved at the international level as the Belgian subnational governments and thus prefer using extra-state routes since these offer them access to (otherwise inaccessible) international organizations (Happaerts et al., 2010).

Conclusion

Global governance for sustainable development is characterized by the need to involve various actors at all levels, from the global to the local. This paper focused on the subnational level and looked at how the Flemish government can exert agency in CSD decision-making. Subnational governments want to be involved in UN decision-making on sustainable development because of their role in the implementation of sustainable development policy. They need, however, to find other ways (than direct representation) to be involved, since they are not recognized as a decision-making actors in the UN. Decision-making in the CSD is particularly important since that Commission does not only determine the global sustainable development agenda of the lower levels, but is also an important forum for information-sharing on best practices and for the formulation of policy recommendations to achieve sustainable development worldwide. Starting from a MLG perspective and from the idea of subnational mobilization, this paper distinguished four routes Flanders can use to exert agency in CSD decision-making, i.e. a multi-level route, a national route, a European route and a direct route. For each of these routes, the paper discussed the main characteristics of the route and how Flanders has used the route with regard to CSD's most recent cycle (2008-2009).

The multi-level route is clearly the most extensively and frequently used route by the Flemish government, in particular by participating in the Belgian delegation for EU and CSD negotiations. Its membership of the Belgian delegation offers the Flemish subnational government many national opportunities to exert agency in the decision-making process. Flanders can, for example, take up the position of pilot in the national coordination meetings, and as a part of the Belgian delegation it can participate at the informal EU decision-making process and at the CSD meeting itself, where usually the final positions are adopted. Those opportunities result from the Belgian institutional context and contribute to the explanation why Flanders mainly used the multi-level route. The other options within the multi-level route were in general used less because of the already well functioning intra-Belgian coordination mechanisms for CSD decision-making. The multi-level route illustrates that multiple levels can be involved in decision-making for sustainable development. In addition, it shows that the federal government is not necessarily the unique actor anymore. It has to share its decision-making competences with subnational actors, although it keeps playing an important coordinating role at the national level. In sum, the Flemish government takes part at a complex multi-level decision-making process in which coordination and cooperation between various actors from different levels are of crucial importance.

Running partly parallel to the multi-level route, the national route has been used with regard to CSD-16 and CSD-17, though in a limited way because of the low number of

Belgian interventions. The other two routes did not offer many opportunities for the Flemish government to exert agency in CSD-16 and CSD-17 decision-making. Within the European route, only the option of approaching members of the European Commission seemed to offer opportunities for Flanders. The other examples of the European route were less applicable because 1) no European Commission legislative proposals are developed concerning CSD decision-making, which limits the possible influence the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions can have; 2) no MEPs delegation was send to CSD-16 and CSD-17; and 3) the highest EU preparatory decision-making body for CSD is the WPIEI/global, while only a limited role is put aside for the Council of Ministers. The last route, the direct one, could offer opportunities to be directly involved in CSD decision-making, but the inter-subnational network nrg4SD did not attend the CSD-16 and the CSD-17 meetings. In addition, Flanders has been very sceptical about nrg4SD's functioning since 2007 and has not used the Network before to exert direct agency in CSD decision-making.

The analysis of the routes Flanders has used to exert agency in CSD decision-making shows that mostly intra-state routes, such as the multi-level and the national route, were preferred by the Flemish government. One possible explanation for that choice could be that the Belgian institutional context provides large constitutional access for the Flemish government to CSD decision-making. Yet, theoretical insights are needed to explain why the Flemish government prefers to use intra-state routes. The conceptual framework elaborated in this paper, namely MLG, has no or only few explanatory power. By applying a MLG perspective it was possible to answer research questions, such as '*What* are the possible routes the Flemish government can use to be involved in the CSD decision-making process?' and '*How* has the Flemish government used these routes?'. In order to answer the question '*Why* does the Flemish government use these routes' other, theoretical, insights are necessary. The latter will be the object of further research, in which the explanatory factors offered by New Institutionalism will be considered. Particular attention will be paid to the possible impact of three institutional contexts, i.e. the Belgian institutional context, the EU institutional context and the institutional context of the CSD. For each of those institutional contexts, it will be examined if the existing rules and procedures (Rational Choice Institutionalism), the norms and culture (Sociological Institutionalism), and/or history (Historical Institutionalism) affect why the Flemish government chooses for particular routes. Finally, future research will study the involvement of other subnational entities with legislative and constitutional access to the EU (such as German or Spanish subnational entities) and will analyze other multilateral decision-making settings, i.e. the OECD and the EU.

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Policy adviser (2001-2006) at Flemish Government; Department of the Environment, Nature and Energy; Division of International Environmental Policy
26 July 2007

Brauns, Carsten
Administrator at Committee of the Regions; Directorate for Consultative Works - DEVE Commission
18 November 2009

Chasek, Pamela
Executive Director at International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) - Reporting Services; Earth Negotiations Bulletin
6 May 2009

Daniëls, Johan
Flemish Youth Representative to CSD-15

Decroos, Marjan
Environment attaché at Flemish Representation; Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU
31 March 2008

Develtere, Lisa
Flemish Youth Representative to CSD-16 and CSD-17

Dodds, Felix
Executive Director at Stakeholder Forum for a sustainable future
8 May 2009

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Coordinator at Federal Planning Bureau; Task Force Sustainable Development

Gurban, Gyorgyi
Policy Officer at European Commission; DG Environment
21 September 2009

Leonet, Yves-Marie
Secretariat-General of EU Council Secretariat; DG I – Environment
1 July 2009

Merckx, Remy
Head of Division at Flemish Government; Department of the Environment, Nature and Energy; Division of International Environmental Policy

Osborn, Derek
Vice-President at European Economic and Social Committee; Sustainable Development Observatory
President of Stakeholder Forum for a sustainable future
29 September 2009

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[41] Many of the information resulted from informal talks when taking part in the Belgian delegation during the non-participatory observation. For members of the Belgian delegation no interview date is noted in the list of respondents.

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    Sustainable Development attaché (2006-2008) at Flemish Representation; Permanent
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    13 May 2009

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    Liaison Officer at nrg4SD
    19 November 2009

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    21 September 2009

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    18 November 2009

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    Sustainable Development
    7 and 11 May 2009

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    Knowledge Management Products
    7 May 2009