

Geneva Environment Network (GEN)

Trade and Green Economy High-Level Panel & Handbook Launch

28 April 2015, Graduate Institute, Auditoire Jacques-Freymond, Geneva, 13.00-15.00

Intervention by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN)

Thank you for giving the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment the opportunity to say a few words following the interventions from the high-level panel. We also would like to thank the GEN for convening this event and the Graduate Institute for hosting it.

First of all, we would like to congratulate UNEP and IISD for their impressive work in updating the handbook. Explaining the multiple and complex links between the environment and trade, through green economy, is not a trivial exercise.

The handbook has been renamed from “environment and trade” to “trade and green economy”. This evolution in semantic reflects the belief that the transition to a green economy in as many countries as possible is key to achieve sustainable development. More, green economy seems also to be key in driving the power of trade towards this goal.

As it has been said, the links between trade and the environment are very complex. Trade itself has become more complex as it is not only used for selling goods and services but increasingly also for making them, along the global value chains.

Environment is also very complex. Complex to understand and complex to manage as it is at the same time local and global, with immediate and rapid changes as well as with longer and distant evolutions.

In fact, all human activities begin with, and end in, the environment. Reconnecting the economic system with the environment is the main objective of the green economy concept. And trade, being the engine of the economic system has an important role to play towards this objective. But this will not be straightforward.

The handbook explains the challenges of aligning trade rules and environmental rules so that the transition towards the green economy can happen. There will be later this afternoon, in the WTO, an expert panel on the Evolution of trade and environmental jurisprudence. Clearly, a Revolution in the trade and environmental rules to reconstruct an integrated green economy body of rules is unimaginable, so patience is required until the jurisprudence show us the way towards sustainable development.

In our view, green economy is about discrimination among like-products and constitute a paradigm shift. How goods are produced does matter, for consumers and for producers. The interpretation of trade and environmental rules must allow for the expected shift towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns, that is the promise of a green economy.

Greener is the key word, not green (not yet). The transition begins with differentiation and preference for greener goods, produced along greener value chains and consumed and disposed in a greener way.

The handbook explains what are the obstacles (political, economical, legal, financial, technological, institutional) for this transition to take place, given the bodies of law and rules (and the institutions) in both trade and environment regimes.

But it provides also some hope, based on the recent evolution of two regimes towards the reconciliation of the economy and the environment, towards green economy.

The handbook is a must-read, and an invitation, for everyone wanting to act for the transition to a green economy, with the feet on the earth and the head in the clouds. The solutions must be at the same time practical (feet on the earth) and innovative (head in the clouds), transforming risks into opportunities and costs into investments.

So enough talking, let's act. Thank you.