

Sustainable development – the goal or source of global progress

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Abstract: One of the most important concepts of the development of the modern world is the successful conception of development policy and the identification of the impulse of sustainable development. Previous growth and development theories, based on quantitative theories and only economic growth determinants, are outdated from today's perspective and less in use. Contemporary world implies a holistic approach to development, according to which the priority is the formation of a coherent national development policy in line with the UN Agenda 2030. The focus of the analysis of the paper is on sustainable development indicators. The aim is to consider the effects of certain sustainable development indicators, to analyse the indicators at the EU level and confirm the importance of introducing the indicators into the national development strategy. The results of the analysis have proved that more flexible economic systems displayed a higher level of efficiency and reached a high level of the value of the set sustainable development indicators. The introduction of new sustainable development indicators at the national level can become imperative for future researches.

Key words: Sustainable Development, SDGs EU, Poland, Serbia

JEL: Q01, P52, O44

Introduction

In recent years, sustainable development has become a major topic, along with digitalization and the green economy. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda by the UN (2015) was preceded by two years of negotiations on the priority areas of international cooperation within the field of UN development policy, happening also after the deadline for the implementation of the Millennium Agenda. Four components were discussed: Political Declaration, Sustainable Development Goals, Global Partnership and the Implementation of the Measures and Rules for Reviewing and Monitoring Process. The goal of adopting the 2030 Agenda implies the overall transformation of the financial, economic and political system that governs our societies in order to ensure human rights (UN, 2020). The initiatives of the most developed countries worldwide, numerous campaigns, summits on this topic and increasing number of research papers in this field undoubtedly indicate how important this topic is. Over time, data series for most countries have become available for all 17 targets and

231 unique indicators¹⁴. Long time series data¹⁵ allow us to conduct a comparative analysis between countries by measuring the degree of sustainability of economies. Simultaneously, this enables the adoption of precise assessments regarding the definition, application, and implementation of these indicators in national development strategies. Currently, the sustainability of the indicators is further growing due to the COVID-19 pandemic - the health, economic and social crisis is threatening lives and livelihood (UN 2020).

This paper is divided into four thematic units. After the introductory part and literature review, there is an overview of indicators from the UN 2030 Agenda, EU priorities for the period 2019-2024, and sustainability indicators from the development strategies of Poland and Serbia. We chose Poland because of the best results of SDG indicators during EU membership, out of all ten member states since 2004. Also, these results can be a benchmark for Serbia as the country with the best results of indicators in relation to other potential candidates for EU membership. Chapter 4 will analyse the degree of the connection of EU priorities, sustainability indicators of Poland and Serbia with the UN 2030 Agenda. The discussion of the results is discussed in Chapter 5. The last part presents concluding remarks.

Literary Review

The holistic nature of sustainable development indicators implies the existence of a large number of potential interactions between the goals, as well as the interaction between the indicators. Hence, there is growing importance of including sustainable growth indicators in the national development strategy of all countries. This phase needs to be accompanied by raising individuals' awareness. If individuals are really aware of the importance of implementing all sustainable development indicators, then their interaction will be much simpler. Public institutions, companies, organizations, and individuals are invited to meet this challenge.

García-Feijoo et al. (2020) and Weybrecht (2017) analysed the role of business schools and knowledge management in achieving sustainable development goals and the ways in which they can be engaged in the activities. Pradhan et al. (2017) state that SDG 1 (No Poverty) has a synergistic relationship with many SDGs, while SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) is associated with trade-offs, especially in terms of economic

¹⁴ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/> (seen 26.02.2021; 5:56 pm)

¹⁵ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/> (seen 26.02.2021; 5:56 pm)

progress. On the other hand, Kroll et al. (2019) wondered how much humanity is able to maximize synergies and resolve existing trade-offs between SDGs. They showed examples of successful transformation of trade-offs into synergies, but also stated the impossibility of overcoming certain persistent trade-offs, which can seriously jeopardize the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Similarly, Schmidt et al. (2015) analysed whether there is cohesion between public health, universal health insurance, and SDGs. They pointed out that strong cohesion is needed to resolve the dilemma. Lusseau & Mancini (2019) believe that cohesion is difficult to achieve when it comes to limiting climate change, reducing inequality and responsible consumption, but it is easily achievable in poverty alleviation and reducing inequality. However, with SDGs, a new level of ability to classify interactions has emerged so that these issues can be examined more systematically in the future (Costanza et al., 2016; Rickels et al., 2016; Nilsson et al., 2016).

Sustainable development indicators – UN, EU, Poland, Serbia

In August 2015, the leaders of 193 countries agreed on 17 global goals that will make the world a better and healthier place to live in the next 15 years. The official Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were set. The intention was clear, setting goals which will create a better world by 2030, eliminating poverty and hunger, fighting inequality, addressing the urgency of climate change, behaving responsibly towards society, a higher level of education. The goal defined in this way is a task for all countries, all governments, all companies, all individuals, to work together to build a better future for all of us and future generations. It is possible to achieve it by preserving the environment, maintaining a quality system, adequate state incentives, and environmental education. The speed at which countries will adapt to these goals and the common global interest will be reflected in the ability of their governments. Since an efficient and flexible system gives better results, it is of global interest to improve the conceptual and responsible approach, along with the guidelines for its implementation.

The UN Expert Group on sustainable development indicators approved a set of 230 individual indicators for monitoring the progress to achieve SDGs (UNESCO, 2016). Currently, the United Nations Statistics Division can provide the data on 231 indicators out of a total of 227 countries for the period between 1983 and 2019. The data are classified by countries,

gender, age, urban and rural population or income groups. Multiple time series are available for the same indicator.

The EU's first concrete steps towards sustainable development were made in the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) in 2001 (revised in 2006). With the global initiative of the 2030 Agenda, the European Commission announced in 2016 the integration of SDGs in the EU policy and adopted a special set of 100 indicators for monitoring Sustainable Development Goals (source: EUROSTAT). In its new set of goals for the period 2019-2024, Europe aims to become a modern, resource-efficient, digital economy with attractive investment environment, having the growth that generates quality jobs, especially for young people and small businesses. Strengthening of the EU will be achieved by advocating for multilateralism and a rules-based global order, and protecting the rule of law and democracy (von der Leyen, 2018).

Table 1. Sustainable Development Indicators

	UN 2030 Agenda	EC priorities for 2019-24	Poland	Serbia
1	No Poverty	A European Green Deal	SP II	MG 2
2	Zero Hunger	A Europe Fit for the Digital Age	SP I, SP II	MG 2
3	Good Health and Well-Being	An Economy that Works for People	SP I, SP II, SP III	MG 2
4	Quality Education	A Stronger Europe in the World	SP I, SP II	MG 2
5	Gender Equality	Promoting European Way of Life	SP II	MG 2
6	Clean Weather and Sanitation	A New Push for European Democracy	SP II	MG 3
7	Affordable and Clean Energy		SP I	MG 3
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth		SP I, SP II, SP III	MG 1
9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure		SP I, SP II, SP III	MG 1
10	Reduced Inequalities		SP I, SP II	MG 2
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities		SP I, SP II, SP III	MG 3
12	Responsible Consumption and Production		SP I	MG 3
13	Climate Action		SP I	MG 3
14	Life Below Water		SP III	:
15	Life and Land		SP III	MG 3
16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions		SP I, SP II, SP III	MG 4
17	Partnerships for the Goals		SP I, SP III	MG 4

Source: Authors' calculation

Note: SP – Strategic priorities in Poland: SP I – Social, SP II – Economic, SP III – Environmental

MG – Mapping groups in Serbia; MG 1 – Economic, MG 2 – Human resources, MG 3 – Environmental, MG 4 – Institutional

Poland has paved the way for development indicators through the Strategy for Responsible Development (SRD), which was adopted by the Council of Ministers on February 14, 2017 - the Polish perspective for sustainable and responsible development (Government of Poland, 2018). A serious discussion on defining a new development path was launched in 2018. The presented Strategy focused on a new approach to development policy and the identification of new impulses for development. The high degree of compatibility with the 2030 Agenda was visible in many aspects: at the level of objectives, areas and priority actions, and development indicators. The Polish sustainable development strategy was conceived through three basic dimensions of sustainable development.¹⁶ Within the social dimension - SP I (SDG: 1, 3, 4) puts emphasis on reducing social exclusion, poverty, and all kinds of social inequalities with the aim of improving the quality of life of citizens, along with the development of human and social capital through education, skills, knowledge, and health care of citizens. Economic dimension - SP II (SDG: 2, 8, 9) implies the construction of modern industry, investment in innovation, the use of modern information technology knowledge, digitalization of production processes with high added value, along with the inevitable support for entrepreneurship, internationalization of Polish companies and promotion of Polish brands abroad. In the environmental dimension - SP III (SDG: 6, 11, 12, 15), the aim is to improve the environment (air quality in Polish cities, soil protection, reducing the impact of noise, and electromagnetic fields) and sustainable resource management by increasing available water resources, water quality, rational management of natural and geological resources, as well as efficient waste management. Moreover, Poland is determined to encourage socially and territorially sensitive development, with a high level of employment, quality jobs and a high volume of entrepreneurship, where the benefits of economic growth should be available to everybody (SDG 10). All of the above monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the state and its institutions (quality of adopted laws, efficient administration, strong system of strategic management of development processes, etc.) (SDG 16). Finally, Poland undoubtedly bases its development process on cooperation, partnership and joint responsibility of public entities, companies, and citizens. In doing so, the implementation of the set sustainable development goals depends on the achievement of five related units: Selective Interventions, Education for Sustainable Development, Organizational Structures, Coherence of Development Policies, and

¹⁶ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18881Main_Messages_Poland27s_VNR_short.pdf

Effective Control. In this context, it is planned to connect 44 Polish capital cities, organize 16 regional agencies with the active participation of the economy, public institutions, scientific and research institutions, non-governmental sector, as well as other stakeholders.

Nowadays, Poland bases its sustainable development activities on "5ps", according to the 2030 Agenda (people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership). The National Development Strategy supports SDGs, aiming to implement all the indicators. In achieving SDGs with an environmental dimension, Poland improves the environment and strives for sustainable resource management, through the priorities of SDGs – 2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 15 (Government of Poland, 2018). Furthermore, citizens have become more environmentally aware in recent years; increasing awareness about air quality protection and climate change. Institutionally, The Polish Government made a major step forward and established the new Ministry of Climate, independent of the existing Ministry of the Environment.

The Sustainable Development Strategy in Serbia is adapting to the 2030 Agenda, with all 17 goals, including three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The figures show that only 39.2% of the indicators from the total number of SDGs in 2020 are available.¹⁷ A brief overview of sustainable growth indicators was prepared in Serbia, and implemented by the Centre for Advanced Economic Studies – CEVES (CEVES, 2018) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). This report presents certain indicators of the economy, which in certain sequences correspond to SDGs, but which are more focused on economic flows and available data. Even then, it was stated that there were no institutional capacities in Serbia and that these are the basic shortcomings for sustainable development. The priorities are set according to the administrative reform (Principles of Public Administration for EU candidate countries) and the Strategic Framework of Serbia, including the fulfilment of the conditions from the EU chapter. For the purposes of mapping SDGs, four groups are formed in the new document Serbia and the 2030 Agenda (PPC, 2019): (1) Economic Growth (SDGs 8 and 9), (2) Human Resources Development (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10), (3) Environment and Climate (SDGs 6,7, 11,12,13 and 15), (4) Institutions, Finances and Cooperation (SDGs 16 and 17). SDG 14 refers to the use of oceans and seas, so it was not included in the consideration. There are clear links between the umbrella development documents and the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The biggest step

¹⁷ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18881Main_Messages_Poland27s_VNR_short.pdf

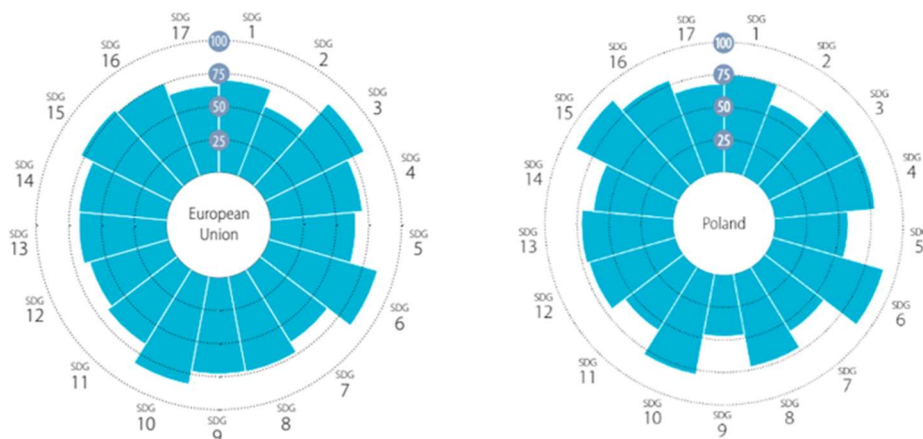
forward in considering SDGs, according to each indicator, was conducted by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS, 2020).

The latest global SDGs Report 2020 states that Serbia and Poland have made a progress in the year with the pandemic compared to 2019. Serbia has climbed 11 places (from 44 to 33, out of 166 analysed countries; index value 75.2), while Poland has improved its position by 6 places (from 29 to 23; index value 78.1).

Results and Discussion

All the indicators of sustainable development for the EU, Poland and Serbia in the period 2005-2019 were analysed. The EU average was used to show the progress of Poland and Serbia in relation to EU members; while for Serbia, the comparison of the values of the indicators with Poland was used to see the necessary efforts of Serbia to approach EU members in terms of sustainable development. The results illustrate the progress of all the indicators, observed separately. The general impression is that Serbia lags behind in almost every indicator, while Poland is better than the EU average in some indicators. EUROSTAT data (Table A1) are available for all the indicators for the EU and Poland (see Graph 1), for almost the entire analysed period, while for Serbia a large number of data series are missing (available data series for 89 out of 231 indicators). Overall, the world is moving towards SDGs. This is particularly emphasised in lower middle-income countries as well as a low initial base (Sach et al, 2020). According to this report, the SDG index tracks a country's performance on 17 SDGs with equal weight for all 17 targets. The combined index of Poland (score 78.1, rank 23) and Serbia (score 75.2, rank 33) suggests that the country is on average 78.1% and 75.2%, respectively, of the way to the best possible outcome in 17 sustainable development goals.

Graph 1. Performance by SDG, 2020



Source: Sach et al, 2020

In the analysis of SDG 1 (*No Poverty*), where the emphasis is on eradicating extreme poverty and reducing relative poverty in the following 15 years, we noticed significant progress of Poland in reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion of individuals (SDG_01_10, below the EU), significantly improved living conditions (SDG_01_60, below the EU), while the social protection benefits are higher for fewer employees (SDG_01_40, below the EU) compared to employed individuals (SDG_01_41, below the EU). In Serbia, the risk of poverty has been reduced, but insufficiently. Individuals who are part-time employees are still in trouble, while living conditions are slightly better than in previous years. Poland is also showing a progress with SDG 2 (*Zero Hunger*), where the focus is on safe and sufficient food production with minimal use of synthetic and chemical raw materials, which was mostly due to the increase in organic products (SDG_02_40). Serbia lags far behind in this indicator, because there are no sustainable and resilient production systems.

The health system and health care (SDG 3 - *Good Health and Well-Being*) have been significantly improved, so the life expectancy of the residents of both Poland and Serbia has been extended (SDG_03_10, below the EU), with the progress in the field of health protection against infectious diseases (SDG_03_41, lower rates than the EU average), and reducing environmental risk factors. SDG 4 (*Quality Education*) is an indicator that points to a step into the future through ensuring the access to fair and quality education at all stages of life. Poland has produced remarkable results - the number of early leavers from education has decreased (SDG_04_10A, below the EU), the participation of individuals with higher education has doubled in the analysed period (SDG_04_20, above the EU), and the employment rate

of recent graduates has increased (SDG_04_50, above the EU). This approach to education guarantees long-term economic growth. Serbia is making a slow progress in the field of education (far from the EU average) due to the lack of training and non-formal learning, that is, insufficiently acquired skills and competencies in education. *Gender Equality* (SDG 5) is a matter of individual self-awareness and democratic society. In Poland, there is a progress regarding this issue, but it is slow and worse than the EU average. The gender employment gap has been decreasing (SDG_05_30), the number of seats of women in the parliament and government is growing (SDG_05_50), as is the number of women in senior management positions (SDG_05_60). Serbia has the best results in this field.

The use of water and water resources is an important issue of development, but also of survival. SDG 6 (*Clean Weather and Sanitation*) unequivocally shows the treatment and use of water, sanitation and hygiene, and here Poland shows a high level of awareness and conscientiousness, especially in wastewater treatment (SDG_06_20). Serbia is making a slow progress, as there is insufficient awareness of the importance of water resources management. Energy (SDG 7 - *Affordable and Clean Energy*) is an important resource, like water. Poland is below the EU average in the field of energy both at the level of households (lower final energy consumption in households per capita - SDG_07_20) and at the level of the economy (lower energy productivity - SDG_07_30, lower share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption by sectors - SDG_07_40), as well as the dependence of energy import by products - SDG_07_50). Serbia lags behind Poland in terms of this indicator, and is far from the EU average, because it does not have an affordable, reliable and sustainable energy system. Serbia has the lowest level of dependence of energy import by products compared to Poland and the EU. However, a low numerical value of the indicator may reflect a lower production volume, a smaller product range, a lower energy price, or low net energy export. This is an opportunity to emphasize that the research of the indicators is a complex job, because it implies a broader approach to the analysis of the indicators, their adequate combination, and impartial evaluation of the results.

Graph 2. SDG for Serbia, 2020

SDG	INDICATORS															
SDG 1	1.2.1	1.2.2	1.3.1	1.4.1a, b	1.a.2											
	↑	↑	↑	×	↓											
SDG 2	2.1.2a	2.1.2b	2.1.2c	2.1.2d	2.2.1	2.2.2a	2.2.2b	2.a.1								
	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑								
SDG 3	3.1.1	3.1.2	3.2.1	3.2.2	3.3.2	3.4.1	3.4.2	3.7.1	3.7.2	3.8.1	3.9.3	3.b.1	3.c.1			
	✓	↑	✓	✓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	×	↑	×	↑	↓		
SDG 4	4.1.2a	4.1.2b	4.1.2c	4.2.1	4.2.2	4.3.1	4.5.1	4.6.1								
	×	×	×	↑	↑	↑	×	↑								
SDG 5	5.1.1	5.2.1	5.2.2	5.3.1a	5.3.1b	5.4.1	5.5.1	5.5.2	5.6.1	5.a.2	5.b.1					
	×	×	×	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	×	×	↑					
SDG 6	6.2.1	6.3.1	6.4.1	6.4.2	6.a.1	6.b.1a	6.b.1b	6.b.1c	6.b.1d							
	×	↑	↓	↓	↑	✓	✓	✓	✓							
SDG 7	7.1.1	7.1.2	7.3.1													
	↑	↓	↓													
SDG 8	8.1.1	8.3.1	8.4.2a	8.4.2b	8.5.1a	8.5.1b	8.5.2a	8.5.2b	8.6.1	8.7.1	8.10.1a	8.10.1b				
	↑	↑	↓	↑	×	×	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑				
SDG 9	9.2.1	9.2.2	9.5.1	9.5.2	9.c.1											
	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑											
SDG 10	10.1.1	10.3.1	10.4.1													
	×	×	↑													
SDG 11	11.6.1a	11.6.1b														
	↓	↓														
SDG 12	12.2.2a	12.2.2b														
	↓	↑														
SDG 16	16.1.3	16.1.4	16.2.1	16.2.2	16.3.1	16.3.2	16.5.1	16.6.1	16.9.1	16.b.1						
	×	×	↓	↑	×	↓	×	↑	✓	×						

Source: Progress report on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the Republic of Serbia

The economic indicator (SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth) is rather satisfactory in the Polish economy. The average annual growth rate in this period of almost 4% enabled Poland to achieve the growth of real GDP per capita in euros (SDG_08_10, below the EU). The high growth rate of the economy (SDG_08_10, above the EU) was contributed by the investments (SDG_08_11, below the EU) with a share in GDP between 17.5% and 22.5% during the analysed period. This state of the economy enabled young people to get educated and work (SDG_08_20, below the EU), which reflected on employment growth (SDG_08_30, as in the EU), and significantly reduced long-term unemployment (SDG_08_40, far below the EU). In the part related to the indicator which shows a progress towards SDG 5 on gender equality (SDG_05_40) with the idea of promoting social and economic empowerment of women, Poland shows the result far above the EU average. Finally, resource productivity (SDG_12_20) is below the EU average. The situation in Serbia according to SDG 8 is not as favourable as in Poland. Economic growth of 3.1%, on average per year was not well structured. Although the share of investment was slightly higher than in Poland, it did not have

positive effects on employment and long-term unemployment. This means that the investments were not of a production nature. The issue of rational investment in the economy is provided by SDG 9 (*Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure*) through R&D, innovation, inventions, technology, etc. Poland has multiplied its investment in R&D from GDP (SDG_09_10, below the EU), so human capital in science and technology (SDG_09_21, EU level) and the number of patents filed with the European Patent Office (SDG_09_40) have increased.

Eliminating inequality SDG 10 (*Reduced Inequalities*) is an important issue of modern times, both between states and within a state. Poland skilfully uses the tools for inequality elimination (SDG_10_10, below the EU), poverty risk elimination (SDG_10_30, better than the EU), proper income distribution (SDG_10_41, better than the EU). Serbia is making a progress, but it is still below the EU average. SDG 11 (*Sustainable Cities and Communities*) includes the issues of social life. Poland has made a significant progress in recycling municipal waste, which is generated by households in cities, so the index has significantly increased (SDG_11_60, below the EU); however, the rule of law and respect for human rights is unacceptably low - public reporting of crime, violence or vandalism (SDG_16_20, below the EU). In Serbia, waste recycling is insufficiently included in the system, both due to the self-awareness of individuals and insufficient investment capacity to start the production chains for recycling. As for the rule of law and human rights, Serbia has improved its image in Europe, although the reporting has declined in recent years. Economic wealth implies a responsible corporate sector, sustainable consumption and production, with efficient use of resources and the preservation of the environment (SDG 12 - *Responsible Consumption and Production*). Waste generation in Poland poses a direct threat to the sustainability of a healthy environment (SDG_12_50, above EU). Serbia, like Poland, produces a lot of waste.

Democratic institutions, respect for human rights and the rule of law (SDG 16 - *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*) are crucial for the further development of society. Poland has significantly improved and strengthened the institutions of the system, so individuals can rely on objectivity and legality in proceedings (SDG_16_10, EU level), reaching the EU average. Serbia has improved this development component in recent years.

The remaining four objectives (SDG 13 - *Climate Action*, SDG 14 - *Life below Water*, SDG 15 - *Life and Land*, SDG 17 - *Partnerships*) were not analysed, individually by indicators, due to

the unavailability of the data for Serbia, so it was not possible to conduct a comparative analysis.

Concluding remarks

The importance of SDG to the global economy has proved to be immense. Majority of countries have successfully implemented the measures and activities that lead to sustainable development, but there are also a few with poor results. For Serbia, the 2030 Agenda is a challenge because it provides an opportunity to ask key questions - What should Serbia look like in 2030? How much initiative and engagement is needed to reach the desired level of the society in 2030? How to achieve it? The advantage for Serbia, in terms of achieving the set SDGs, is that numerous goals have already been established through the EU accession process. Therefore, this should be taken advantage fo, together with the experience of Poland. Poland has already paved the way for the sustainable development of its state and society. With a responsible approach, Poland will continue to make a progress in the realization of SDGs in the forthcoming period.

The analysis of SDGs in the EU, Poland and Serbia displayed that the set EU standards of sustainable development are currently unattainable for Serbia. On the other hand, Poland is more successful. Poland has reduced the gap compared to the EU average since the moment of membership and has successfully improved the policy of sustainable development, which resulted in better values of the indicators. It is necessary for Serbia to improve the realization of the set goals defined in the action plan. The comprehensive implementation of a set of measures within the system is needed, and the best way is to use the experiences of EU member states that are making a significant progress in sustainable development indicators, such as Poland.

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