

Resource-efficient Europe

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted an own-initiative report by Gerben-Jan GERBRANDY (ALDE, NL) on a resource-efficient Europe in response to a Commission communication on the same subject.

The current economic, financial and environmental crisis shows that Europe urgently needs new sources of sustainable economic growth. The report suggests focusing on the following **priority actions**. The report calls on Commission and the Council to:

1. establish **Joint Task Forces for the three key areas** of food and drink, housing, and mobility in order to develop, as soon as possible, European Resource Efficiency Action Plans ;
2. **remove the obstacles to a functioning European market in recycling and reuse**, and to stimulate such a market by fostering the demand for and availability of recycled materials and by-products, through measures which should include the swift further development of stringent end-of-waste criteria and economic incentives, such as reduced VAT rates for secondary materials;
3. boost **research and technological innovation** in order to speed up the transition to a resource-efficient economy. The Commission is invited to set up an easily accessible, online ‘best practice’ data bank for resource efficiency;
4. **agree, by 2013, on clear, robust and measurable indicators for economic activity** that take account of climate change, biodiversity and resource efficiency from a life-cycle perspective and to use these indicators as a basis for legislative initiatives and concrete reduction targets;
5. **integrate the resource efficiency agenda as comprehensively as possible into all other policies**, including the overarching economic governance policies such as Europe 2020, and to implement it at local, regional, national, and EU level.

Agenda for future growth: Members endorse the Flagship Initiative on a Resource Efficient Europe and the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe and its 2050 vision. They call on the Commission to **put forward swiftly all legislative and other initiatives that are necessary to achieve the milestones** and to ensure that all EU policies are coherently aligned to them and to the overall EU vision for creating a low-carbon economy by 2050, by, inter alia, cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95% compared to 1990 levels.

The report recalls that **decoupling economic growth from resource consumption is essential** for improving Europe’s competitiveness and reducing its resource dependency. It calls on the Commission to propose, by the end of 2012, **a new Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) policy framework**, establishing a process for identifying the priority products or services which contribute the most to the key global consumption areas (water, land, materials and carbon).

Members also underline the urgent need to act now in order to **support innovation and investment** in new techniques and business models, including sectoral industrial strategies and sustainable business models such as a leasing society, and to create the incentives that will bring benefits for the economy.

Transforming the economy: Members consider that for the transition to a resource-efficient economy to be realised, **market prices need to fully reflect the degree of resource scarcity**, as well as all costs entailed in the production process. They endorse the Commission’s commitment in the Roadmap to developing market-based instruments to enable negative externalities to be included in market prices, thereby reflecting the true cost of using resources and their environmental impact.

The Commission and the Member States are invited to:

- develop **incentives** that encourage companies and public bodies to measure, benchmark and continuously improve their water, land, material and carbon footprints,
- extend the **producer responsibility principle** and to remove barriers that hold back resource efficiency;
- adopt, without delay and by 2014, concrete plans based on a clear definition for phasing out all environmentally harmful **subsidies** by 2020.

The Committee calls on the Member States to make a shift towards **environmental taxation**, emphasising that this should allow for cuts in other taxes such as those on labour, increase competitiveness and create a level playing field, and pave the way for technological development. It calls on the Commission and the Member States to monitor and compare the effects of this instrument.

The report stresses the need to:

- develop awareness strategies and strategies to alter consumer behaviour;
- secure a sustainable European supply of raw materials, sufficient to meet the needs of a growing recycling sector;
- introduce stronger requirements on Green Public Procurement (GPP) for products and services that have significant environmental impacts;
- extend environmental information requirements to cover conventional mass consumer goods.

Members call on the Member States to ensure **full implementation of the EU waste acquis**, including minimum targets, through their national waste prevention and management strategies and plans. They call on the Commission to make proposals by 2014 with a view to gradually introducing **a general ban on waste landfill at European level** and for the phasing-out, by the end of this decade, of incineration of recyclable and compostable waste.

Members also call on the Commission and the Member States to take more effective action to combat **illegal shipments of waste**, especially hazardous waste, to non-EU countries. In this context, they call for a 'European external waste policy' be established with a view to spreading the best European waste treatment standards beyond the confines of the EU.

The report highlights the **importance of research, development and innovation** for speeding up the transformation to a resource-efficient Europe. It invites the Commission to investigate how resource efficiency in the EU's mining and processing industry can be boosted in order to increase competitiveness and sustainability, and urges Member States to consider the establishment of centres for innovation technologies to support the extraction, recycling and reuse of useful components from mining waste products and facilitate the subsequent use of mining waste products.

It urges the Commission to examine the effects of a **tax on resources and virgin raw materials**, and in particular any side-effects, such as non-sustainable substitution, tax avoidance or shifting economic activities to third countries.

Natural capital and ecosystem services: the Commission and the Member States are invited to assess the economic value of ecosystems and integrate these values into reporting and accounting systems by 2015.

Members emphasise that **biodiversity** is essential to the existence of human life and the wellbeing of societies. They stress the importance of **water** as a natural resource that is vital for both humankind and ecosystems.

Members take the view that **Europe's resources should be managed in a more strategic and environmentally sound manner**; believes that a greater effort should be made to manage existing resources in the EU, in particular minerals, metals and timber, as well as energy resources including fossil fuels.

The report highlights the importance of **sustainable agriculture and dietary changes** in order to reduce animal protein intake , leading to diminishing imported land use and a reduction in Europe's carbon footprint.

Members stress the need to boost **forestry protection** in the EU and consolidate the associated risk prevention methods. They call on the Commission, together with the timber industry, to examine the scope for specific measures aimed at the sustainable exploitation of forestry resources, in particular via pilot projects.

They urge the Commission also to calculate and disclose the costs of the environmental damage arising as a consequence of the EU's agriculture and fisheries policies.

International dimension: Members consider the efficient and sustainable use and allocation of resources to be a key element of EU industrial policy which should also **inform the Union's external relations** now and in the future. They take the view that a fair, open and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system and the protection of the environment should be mutually reinforcing.

The report reasserts that all current bilateral and regional European trade agreements need to include an **ambitious chapter on sustainability**. It asks the Commission to incorporate issues related to raw materials to a greater extent in current and future negotiations carried out by the EU on a bilateral or multilateral basis.

Members consider that the inclusion of **tariff preferences** for environmental products and services produced in a socially responsible way in the Generalised System of Preferences could generate added value in the area of the EU's trade with developing countries.

Lastly, the report points out that the **upcoming Rio +20 Earth Summit** could be an important forum for discussing the issues of resource efficiency and sustainable development. Members urge the EU and its Member States to play a decisive and positive role at this conference in order to meet the challenges of establishing an inclusive and green economy on a global scale.